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OCTOBER

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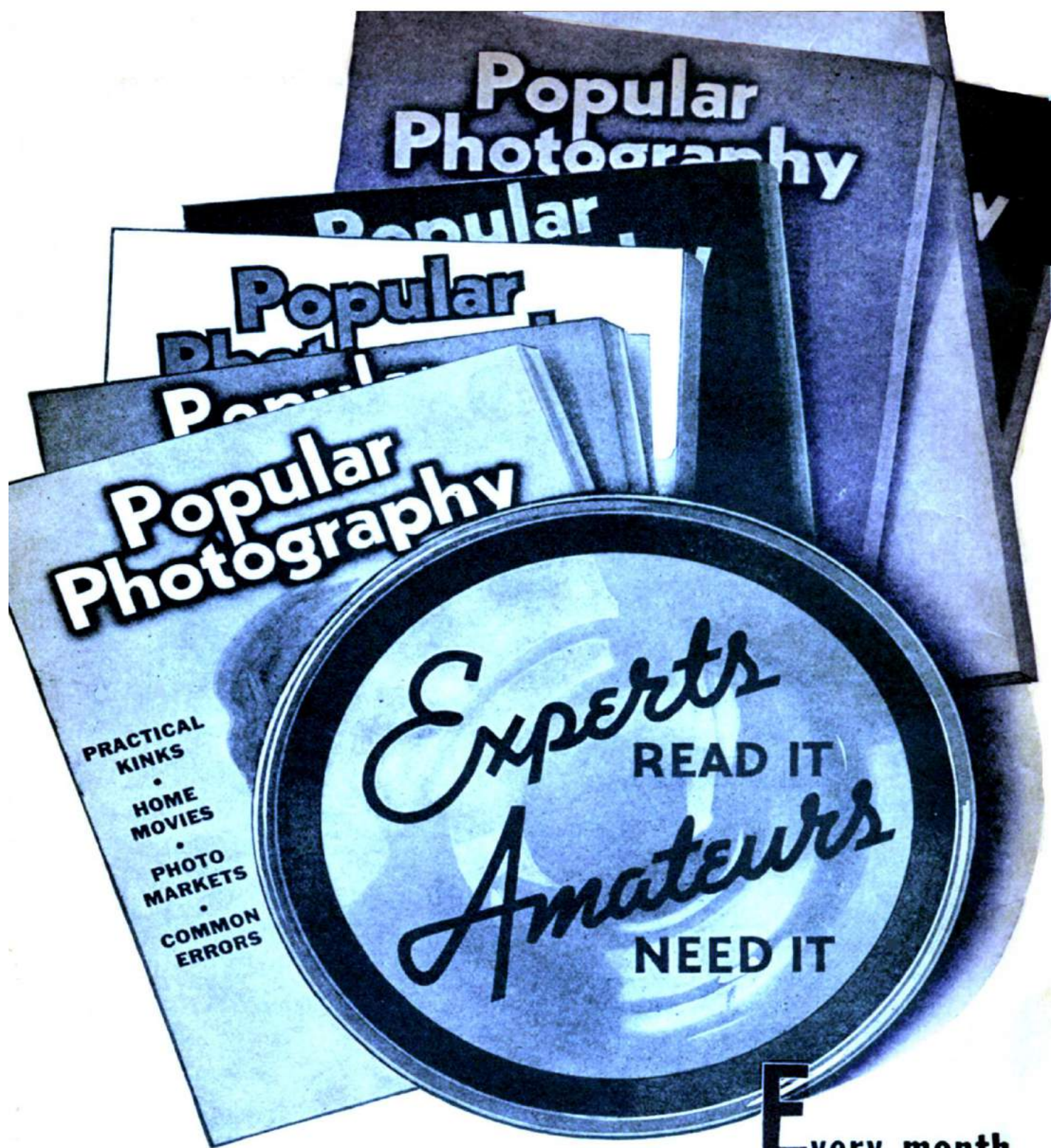
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HISTORICAL ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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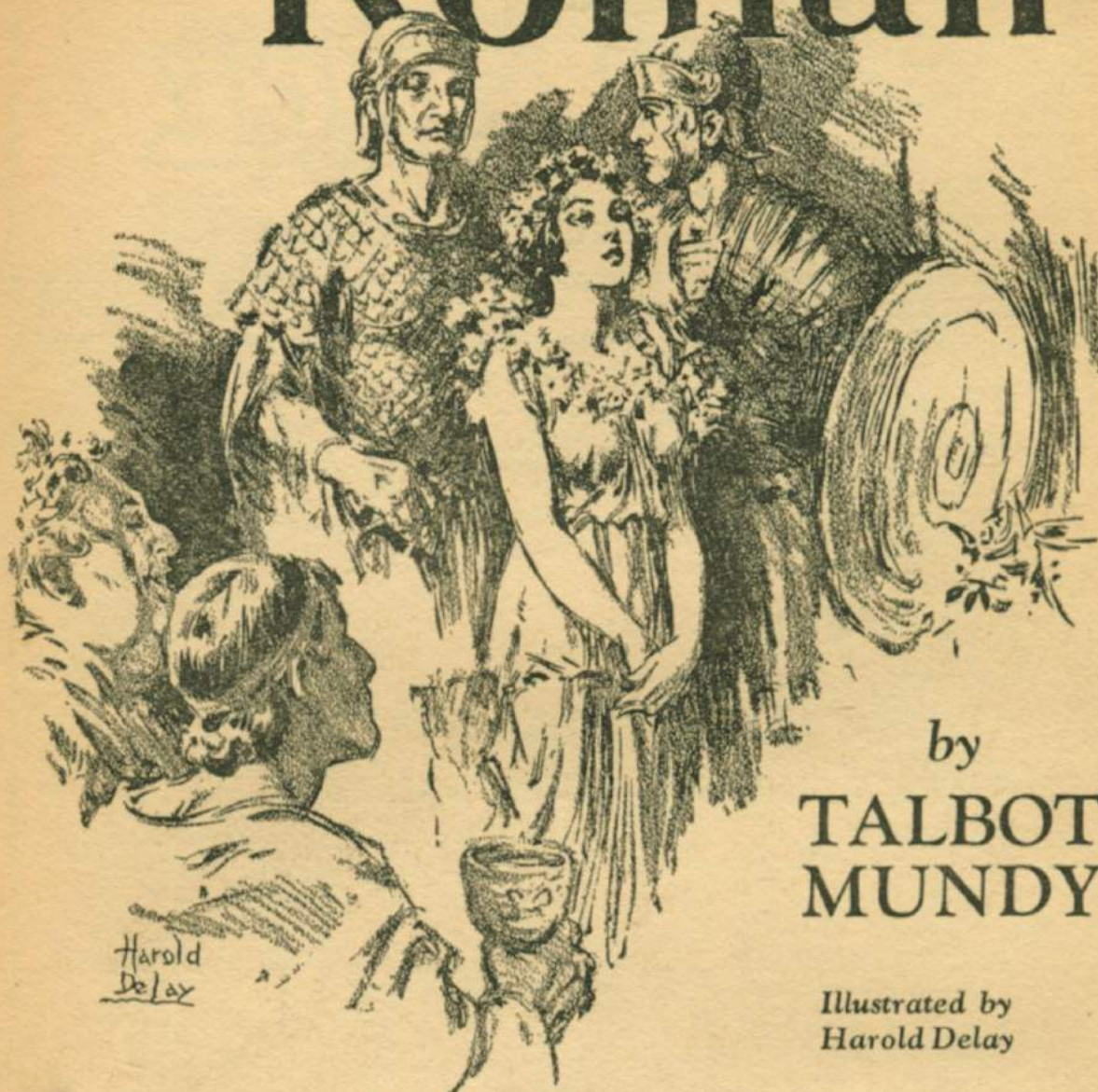
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Roman



by
**TALBOT
MUNDY**

*Illustrated by
Harold Delay*

CHAPTER I

"I was free born in Judea."

SIMON UNOCULUS sat at the gate. He restrained himself. Life was risky in Rome, where the emperor was bestially crazy, which was bad enough; but his ministers were bestially sane, which was much worse. However, a man could be safely obscure in Rome; but, out here in the suburbs, where the great estates lay boundary on boundary

and the rich had locked their back gates to prevent espionage, not even a modest tradesman's life was safe from one hour to another.

"I wish to see the steward, and I only wish to buy skins," he repeated.

"I don't believe you," said Boas. He kept the gate, his qualification for the job being a knack of insolence toward the wrong people and obsequious servility toward the right ones. He lolled on a marble bench beneath the stucco arch and,

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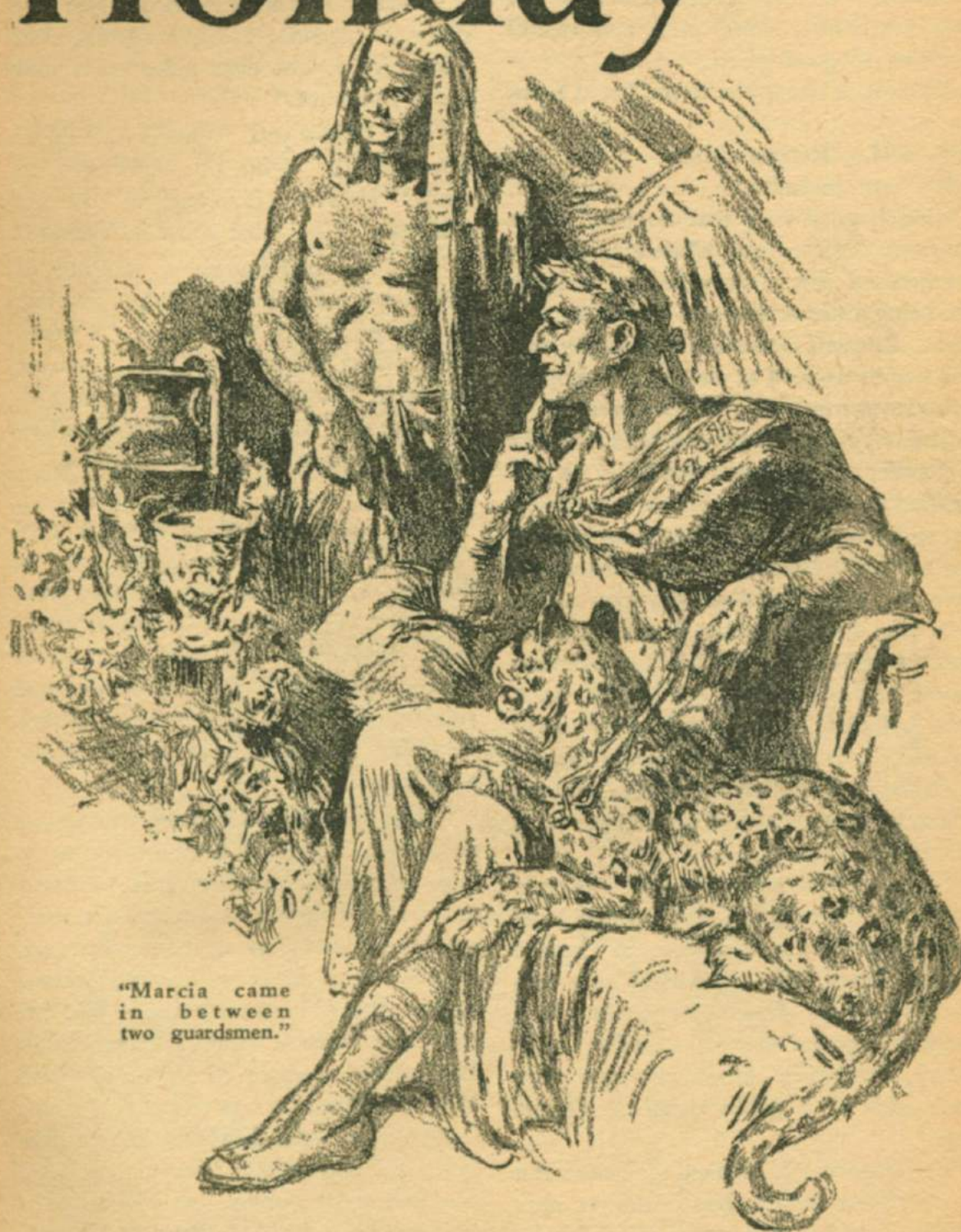
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"I am an honest man," Simon insisted.

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"I am an honest man," Simon insisted.

"I seek leave from the steward to show my dressed leopard-skins to your master Fastidius Flaccus. I sell cheap, and I buy raw hides, skins, pelts and castoff clothing at good prices."

"You look like a Jew to me," said Boas.

"**I** AM a Roman citizen. I was free born in Judea."

"Much good may that do you," Boas retorted. "Jews are Christians. Only yesterday I saw a slave beaten to death for being a Christian—and serves the fool right. I myself overheard him saying that one man is as good as another. I suppose you rate yourself as good as Caesar."

Julius Verres Vulpes overheard that. As a member of the Equestrian order he was entitled to display himself on horseback; but as a matter of convenience he was being carried in his much more comfortable litter by eight matched Egyptian slaves—to dine with Fastidius Flaccus. Vulpes was the last man in the world to overlook moral turpitude. His huge belly shook with indignation. He put himself to the trouble of turning his fat-jowled face to summon the four slave-gladiators, without whom he never ventured beyond the walls of his own villa.

"Seize me that infamous Jew!" he commanded. "Seize him, I say! Cudgel him! I heard him say he is as good as Caesar! I say, I heard him. Hercules! My ears are split by his abominable words! Is a patrician's gate a meeting place for Christians? It is time these Christians were dealt with as a public danger. Cudgel him!"

The leopard-skin cloaked gladiators ran to obey; but before they could get near Simon they had to scatter to avoid the horse of Vergilius Cleander, who cantered up with an armed attendant running beside him. Simon appealed to him instantly, clutching the narrow purple border of

Cleander's tunic, although the attendant tried to prevent that.

"Most illustrious Cleander! Just and generous Cleander! You remember me? I am Simon, who buys hides from your honor's steward."

"Yes, I know you. What is it, Vulpes? Usurping the rights of magistrates, as usual? However, it so happens I protect this man. Now what about it, Vulpes?"

"Oh, if I had known he was one of your boon companions," Vulpes sneered, his big jowls blue with anger, "I would have invited him into my litter! Open me that gate, fellow! Is Julius Verres Vulpes to be kept waiting while Vergilius Cleander gossips with Caesar's enemies?"

THE opened gate revealed a tiled walk, framed in the pastel hues of flowers. It was lined with statuary plundered from the groves of Greece in Sulla's day. Beyond a well spaced group of shade-trees the wall of a great house stood silhouetted against a blood-red sunset. Vergilius Cleander lingered and spoke with Simon.

"Most illustrious Cleander, business is terrible in Rome. They are slaying no more animals in the arena. It is said that a dozen recent shipments of lions and leopards have been lost in a storm at sea. So they send in only unarmed victims against the few mean animals that are left; and because meat is dear, Caesar has ordered them to be fed on the flesh of the victims, which is economical in one sense only, since it makes the pelts worthless. So now is the time to buy good ones before the price goes higher. My artificers have dressed a hundred leopard-skins, all slain in the animals' prime. I have them with me, at the inn."

"That inn is a horrible place," said Cleander.

"True. But I must lodge my porters somewhere."

"Very well. But let them first carry your bales to my house. My steward will give you a place to sleep, and in the morning I will see what you have to offer."

Cleander left his horse outside the gate in charge of his attendant and walked up the path to the house. He was not particularly respectful of his wealthy host, and he was too contemptuous of men like Vulpes to permit himself even to seem to imitate them. So he walked. One half of him loved luxury, devouring beauty with discerning eyes; the other, more stoical half of his nature mocked not only luxury but men who cultivated it, himself included. He knew he was good looking, because he had so often been flattered about it; but the knowledge failed to interest him. He was athletic and in

the pink of condition because he despised effeminacy. He was perfectly turned out, and rode the best horse on the countryside, because he could not endure less than the best; but he was inconsistent enough to loathe the airs and graces of the newly rich. Cleander himself was newly poor, for the third or fourth time; he was so extravagant that he could not keep money, no matter how his steward pleaded and economized; and he was so contemptuous of money that it seemed to flow to him of its own accord and beg to be allowed to refill empty coffers.

Unmarried at thirty, he had never persuaded himself that marriage was desirable, or even tolerable; he considered the modern Roman women vulgar, graceless and immodest. They had broken with the old conventions and ideals, so he went them one better and was devoted to a



"I wish to see the steward, and I only wish to buy skins."

slave named Marcia, whom he had bought because she could play stringed instruments and sing the songs he wrote when he could think of nothing else to pass the time. Her beauty and artistic talent had made him fall deeply in love with her. He was amused, too, by the naively optimistic notions of eternal life that she had learned from a Jew named Paulus.

HOWEVER, Marcia's charms did not prevent him from enjoying the reception in Fastidius Flaccus' vestibule. There was the usual swarm of slaves to wipe his sandals and offer him scented water for his hands; but there were two most sensually charming slave-girls one of whom crowned him with a chaplet of flowers, while the other handed him a small crystal goblet full of the sharp wine that arouses appetite. He did not mind Fastidius Flaccus doing that kind of thing. Flaccus was a patrician, although a man of scant personality, who tried to compensate for that lack by lavish hospitality. The girls might be rather outrageous, but as a foretaste of an evening's entertainment they were beyond criticism. It was such upstarts as Vulpes that Cleander could not tolerate—Vulpes who was so rich that few men dared to defy him, and who had had the insolence to try to buy Cleander's small estate in order to add it to his own, which was growing constantly.

There were seven guests. Vulpes had the seat of honor at his host's right hand; Cleander's couch was at the middle of the table, on the left hand side. It was annoying to have to sit facing Vulpes; one could not look at one's host without being offended by the sight of Vulpes' gluttony, nor speak to one's host without seeming to bespeak Vulpes also. Even the bouquet and the flavor of the wine were ruined for Cleander by the sight of Vul-

pes swilling the precious stuff as if it were nothing wonderful. And for the same reason he could not enjoy the dancing girls, who had been sent from Rome by a contractor. They were marvelously trained; they knew every sensuous and suggestive trick, and how to beautify it with an air of innocence; to Cleander they were vastly more attractive than the wine or the endless procession of rich viands, cooked by a slave who was said to have been bought for twenty thousand sesterces. But Vulpes looked at them with gloating eyes that filled Cleander with disgust; he could not endure to share even an emotion with Vulpes.

So the conversation developed, before long, into a duel between them, encouraged by the other guests, who were afraid of Vulpes but well pleased to watch Cleander thrust at the man's offensive purse-pride. And Fastidius Flaccus, though irritated, and even alarmed, was an easy-going man who had no notion how to keep a conversation within limits. Vulpes was in a mood to show his statesmanship.

"I tell you," he insisted, "Christians are a public menace. They are most of them slaves and the scrapings of debtors' prisons, who have been promised by Jews that slavery and wealth shall be abolished. Naturally slaves like the prospect of that." He glared at Cleander. "Men who have squandered their fortunes are the next to listen."

"Poor fat Vulpes!" Cleander sympathized. "How that great paunch of yours is full of dreads!"

"You will see," Vulpes insisted; for the wine was taking hold of him, and he was showing off, too, for the benefit of a dancing girl who might be one of Caesar's spies, so flatteringly attentive she was. "There will be another slave war. Mark my prophetic word. There was unrest in Augustus' reign. There was

worse unrest under Tiberius. Today, there are three or four slaves to every free man, and the unrest has become conspiracy incited by these Christians. It will end by our having to crucify a hundred thousand of them."

"Too much wealth and too much gluttony bring bad dreams," said Cleander. "There are not a thousand Christians in all Rome—not many more than a thousand in all Italy. Of what are you afraid?"

"Of men like you," Vulpes answered. "It is true I have had bad dreams, but such are sent to us as warnings. I fear for the imperium, and for the life of our beloved Caesar. Caesar should be warned against the Christians. And let me warn you, young man! The provinces are safer—do you understand me?"

"Perfectly. You bought my debts once, but I disappointed you by paying them. So now I am to be scared into flight, in order that Caesar's friend Vulpes may be appointed custodian of my estate?" A sudden recklessness began to riot in Cleander's veins. "Too complicated, Vulpes—too contemptible—too stupid. How much is my estate worth?"

"**F**IVE hundred thousand sesterces," Vulpes answered promptly. He knew the forced sale value of every property he craved to own.

"That is about half its value. However, let the gods decide between your greed and my contempt for it. One throw of the dice! Win, you own my house and lands. Lose, and you pay me five hundred thousand sesterces."

"Throw in Marcia," said Vulpes.

"Not for a million sesterces. Are you afraid?"

"Not I. Bring on the dice. Bear witness, all of you: Cleander's house

and lands against five hundred thousand sesterces. Who shall throw first?"

There was argument about that, but Fastidius Flaccus decided it, by throwing the dice the gamblers were to use, and the first throw fell to Vulpes, who called on the goddess Venus:

"I was ever loyal to you. I have had your shrine re-gilded. I will give a necklace of choice jewels for your statue. Only favor me against that unbeliever!"

Suddenly he threw—two fives and a four. "Not bad," he said, but he was disappointed. "Beat that if you can, Cleander."

Even the female tumbler, who was dancing naked amid upturned knives, stood still while a slave took the dice to Cleander. The wild string-music ceased. Cleander seemed the only person unconcerned.

"Two fives and a four? Yours, Vulpes, looks like Caligula's luck," he remarked. The emperor notoriously cheated at the game. "You will all pardon me if I examine the dice?"

"They are mine. They are new," said Fastidius Flaccus. So Cleander waived examination— "unless Vulpes gave them to you?" he suggested.

"Call on Christ!" sneered Vulpes. "I am told your Marcia is a Christian. Hasn't she taught you how to shake the box?"

Cleander showed exasperating calm. He threw two sixes and a three, and hardly glanced at them.

"You may draw me a bill of exchange on Rome. I will be waiting for it at my house tomorrow morning, Vulpes."

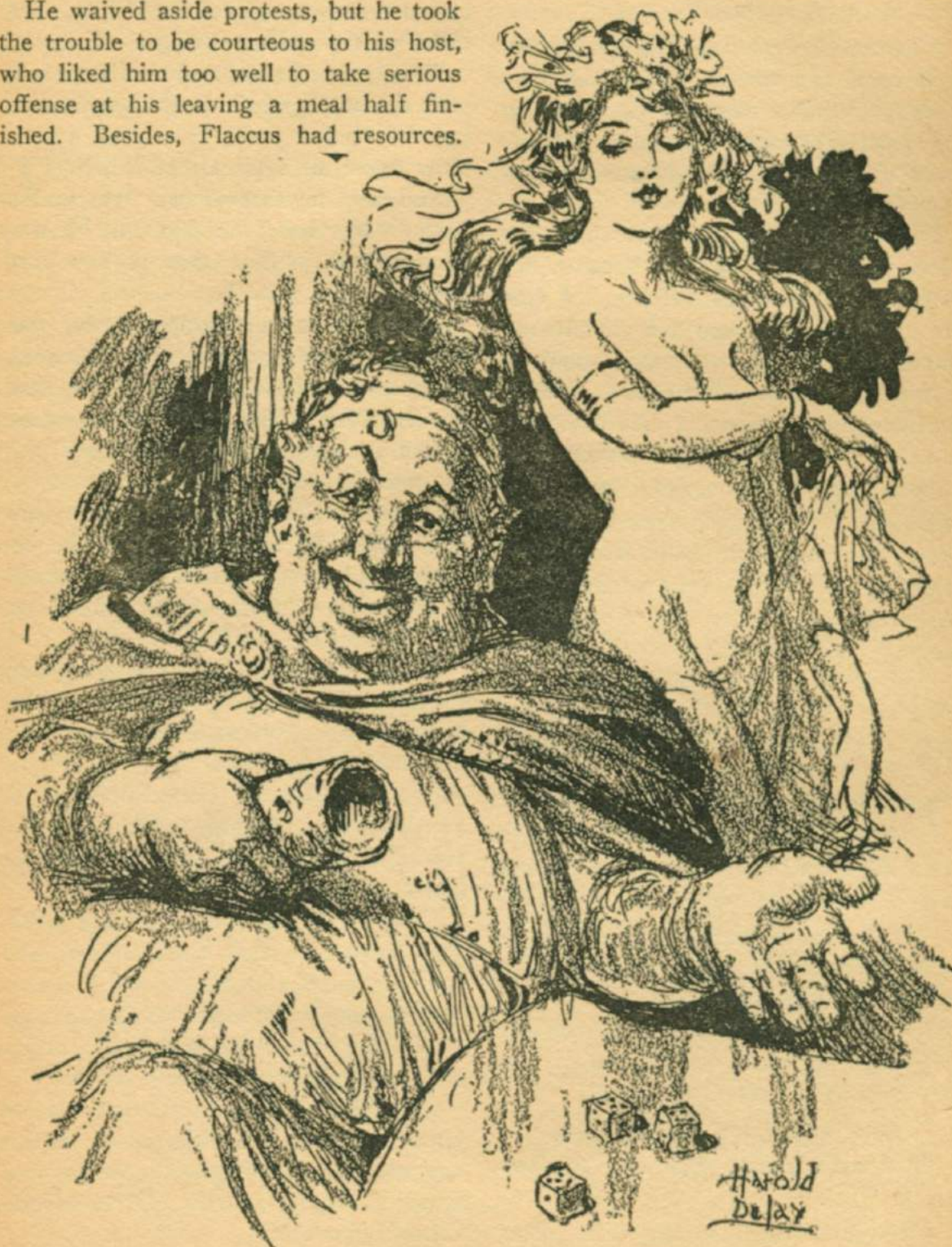
"Double! I dare you to double it! One throw for the doubled stake. Venus against your Christ again." Vulpes was scowling, but he did his best to imitate Cleander's coolness.

"No. I call you all to witness, I said

one throw. And now I go home. Vulpes is a poor loser and I don't enjoy his lamentations. However, I thank you, Vulpes; your immodest money will pay my modest debts twice over."

He waived aside protests, but he took the trouble to be courteous to his host, who liked him too well to take serious offense at his leaving a meal half finished. Besides, Flaccus had resources.

As Cleander wrapped his toga around him and stepped forth into the moonlight, Flaccus whispered to a servant. Hardly a moment later, one of Rome's least innocent entertainers threw her arm



"Beat that if you can, Cleander."

around Cleander's shoulder. She looked lovelier, because more living, than the statue of Leda bathed in moonlight at the turn of the path, and she was scented with Egyptian perfume.

"Lover, return and love me by and by," she whispered. "I know all the elegancies—all the subtleties."

"Try them on Vulpes," he answered. He shoved her away, and she cursed him in a low voice, with ingenious profanities such as Arabs address to stray dogs. She was valuable; she knew that her contractor-master would protect her for his own sake, provided there were no witnesses to convict her of insolence. Cleander knew it, too, and, with a twist of his toga, shrugged her out of mind.

CHAPTER II

"I keep some promises."

THERE was a summer-house in his garden and Cleander went there instead of to the house. He sat drinking in the midnight silence, his eyes excited by the beauty of the scene on which he had gazed a thousand times. He almost forgot he had offended Vulpes; he entirely forgot his attendant Strabo, whom he had told to go to bed and who, he knew, if he had thought about it, would be news on the wing. Swift as a bat, he would go straight to the steward Giton and regale him with a garbled account of the evening's events, gleaned piecemeal from Flaccus' servants.

However, Cleander was in one of his restlessly poetic moods in which nothing of that sort mattered. He was in a mood to watch the stars and speculate on the meaning of life and death. He was displeased when he saw Marcia coming—displeased, that is, until the beauty of her movement and the almost

spectral marvel of her outline made imagination leap. He could forgive anyone anything who could do that. By the time she reached him he had recalled the hours they had spent in that place together, and he even mocked himself as he remembered he had never thought at all about the stars until Marcia sang a hymn about them that she had learned from a Jew in Rome.

As his slave—his marketable chattel—it was not within the scope of even her wide privilege to bring him down to earth too soon. She was not his wife. She had to yield, first, to his caresses and to guide him, subtlety by subtlety, until in the end he almost asked her outright for the words she was bursting to speak.

"Marcia, your eyes are lovelier than stars. Your body is more beautiful than—"

"Confess, my master! Did you even notice I was beautiful until I sang to you one night, and then you asked about the song, and I told you? Then you gave me leave to speak such words as those to you at all times, even though they should amount to reproof, because, you said, wisdom and beauty are one?"

"Oh, am I to be scolded?"

"Never! But do you think it just, most generous Cleander, to fill me with such great happiness, so that I love you more than all the world; and then to crown that happiness by saying that I make you happy; but then—on a throw of the dice—to risk such happiness?"

"Who told you, Marcia? Have Vulpes' lamentations fouled the midnight air already?"

"Strabo awoke Giton, who awoke me. Vulpes—"

"Hah! I wager that malice is burning that great belly of his!"

"Watch, Cleander, lest it burn you

also. Is it not the law, that if anyone's possessions become forfeited to the emperor for treason, the informer shall receive one half? That is how Vulpes has grown rich."

"Who told you?"

"Simon Unoculus."

"And where did omniscient one-eyed Simon get his information?"

"Let him speak for himself."

SHE was gone before Cleander could protest, and she was back again with Simon much too soon for Simon not to have been waiting near at hand.

"Most gracious Cleander—"

"You may omit the list of my alleged virtues for the moment, Simon. Cut short your story, too, I pray you. What is this you have been telling Marcia about Julius Verres Vulpes? And where did you learn it?"

Simon's unembarrassment was almost as dramatic as the scene itself. He was a veteran who had seen all sorts of intimacies, and to whom a love-nest was only one more ninepin for the ball of Jehovah's hurling.

"Most noble Cleander, I am only a poor tradesman, but sometimes even the poor can do little favors for one another. Those condemned to die have hopes and fears and hatreds just like anybody else. So Gaius Ruber the lanista—he who has charge of the dungeons and of the sendings into the arena—your honor knows him?"

"No. I have heard he is popular."

"He is successful; and like all successful men, he has a system. Even I, who deal in leopard-pelts, succeeding only in a small way, have a system. Gaius Ruber is successful because so many of his prisoners go forth splendidly to die. It grows monotonous if all of them die like sheep in a shambles; the public likes

to see some of them die bravely. And I must confess, it seems better to me to die cheerfully than miserably."

"On with your story, Simon. You begin to bore me."

"Patience, excellency, I am coming to it. Why should I waste your valuable moments? I, who buy the pelts of leopards that are slain in the arena, keep my peace with Gaius Ruber, who attends to it that the best ones fall to my share. Gaius Ruber gives me access to the dungeons, where men of high rank, whom Caesar has degraded and condemned, lie crowded together with common criminals. Some of them are no worse than you and I, if you will forgive the comparison; and the gentler they are, the more they crave little favors, down there in the stinking darkness. I am a good listener. And it is easy to promise. Many a victim has faced the lions and leopards gallantly because he thought he had sown the seeds of vengeance in my ears and believed I would inform against informers. Such tales I have heard—such tales—eh-yeh!"

"A contemptible system, Simon."

"Is it? I keep some promises. Some of them send only farewell messages to them they love. But I have heard tales even against the magistrates, and against the friends of Caesar. It so happens that I spoke, in the dungeons, shortly before they died, with Livius Carfax, and with Titus Iturbius Varro, and with Coriolanus Nepos—men of high rank, as your honor doubtless knows, whom Caesar had degraded that they might be slain with ignominy. They were accused of having slandered Caesar; and all three told me that their secret accuser was Julius Verres Vulpes. Furthermore, they gave me information against Vulpes, thinking I would wreak their vengeance on him in the hope of

an informer's share of the spoils, not suspecting that I prefer to mind my own business, as being very much safer in the long run. It is possibly within your honor's competence to find out whether Vulpes came into possession of the half of those three men's estates."

CLEANDER nodded. "He is supposed to have purchased them."

"Yes," said Marcia, "he did. At the price of his soul he bought them. There was a man named Judas—"

"Eh-eh-eh-eh!" Simon plucked at Cleander's toga that he had thrown over Marcia's naked shoulders. "None of that talk, it is dangerous; I have seen as many as nineteen Christians sent into the arena in one party, condemned for having said that God will deal with the tax-gatherers. Caesar's spies have long ears."

"Asses' ears," said Marcia.

"But I was saying: Livius Carfax, Titus Varro and Coriolanus Nepos, all three, told me that the cause of Vulpes' hatred of them was merely some hot words passed amid the wine cups."

Marcia stood with clenched hands, staring at the stars, Cleander wishing he were a sculptor that he might catch that subtly sensuous outline and record it. Suddenly she turned and faced him.

"I am your slave, but you have said you love me. And I love you so, that I would rather die at your hands than not say what I know. Beat me—crucify me if you will—but listen first."

"Don't be ridiculous, Marcia. You may say what you wish."

"Cleander—Vulpes craves to own this villa. And he hates you. We all know it. Strabo has told us how you won from him tonight. But do you think that Vulpes would have risked his money if he had not known that it was no real

risk? What if he has already informed against you? What if Caesar's lictors reach your house before Vulpes can have time to pay the money? Or what if he pays the money, but the lictors come then? Is the price too high? Suppose Caesar takes the money; and Vulpes, for having informed against you, receives land, house, slaves and furniture? Will Vulpes not have bought a bargain?"

"This is a nightmare," said Cleander, "a mere nightmare." But he was growing thoughtful. He remembered Vulpes' diatribe against the Christians and his sneer, at Flaccus' front gate, about talking with Caesar's enemies.

MARCIA bared her breast to him, and in the moonlight it looked lovelier than Grecian marble. "If you love me, as I truly think you do, Cleander, slay me rather than let Vulpes—"

"Cover yourself, child, and don't talk nonsense. Let me think a moment." He got up and began pacing the floor of the summer-house, pausing, each time he turned, to gaze at the shadowy landscape and the clouds reflected in the star-lit pond.

"It is too bad that the Christians make such trouble for us all," said Simon. "It is known that the Christians teach each other that Caesar is no god, though he pretends he is and invites the moon to come and share his bed. And that makes trouble for all Jews, because we think the same, so they accuse us of being Christians, which we are not."

"I am known to be a Christian," said Marcia. "And so are many other of your slaves, because I taught them. Have you not permitted that, Cleander? And have I not tried to teach you also? If you are accused, and you deny you are a Christian, they will put all your slaves to torture. And though those of us who

are Christians will tell the truth, that you are not one, there will be others, who will say what the magistrates wish them to say, so it will do you no good."

"And that," said Simon, "means the dungeons and the lions." He lowered his voice. "For me also, if I am found here. They will accuse me also. Noble Cleander, I warn you: I am not one who can endure the torture. I have seen a black slave, with a hot iron through his foot, who refused, nevertheless, to change his testimony; and it was false testimony, that he gave to protect his master; and though they crucified him on the Via Appia he never changed one word of it. But not I—nay, nay—I have not that fortitude."

"If you are so afraid, then why not go?" Cleander asked him.

"But my leopard pelts? I brought them, as you commanded."

"Choose then between the leopards' skins and your own!" said Cleander, smiling. "No, no, Simon, I was jesting. Go to the columbaria. Tell my steward Giton he is to give you porters to carry your bundles, and he is also to lend you my four gladiators to protect you from thieves until daylight. Then bring me pen and ink and I will write you a pass, saying that you travel on honest business; nobody will question that."

"May I live to reward your kindness!" Simon thrust his one eye closer to Cleander's than was good manners. "May I live to recompense you!" Then he vanished in the direction of the "dove-cote," where, because he preferred a contented household, Cleander's slaves were quartered better than some men's horses. Even the so-called gladiators, whose real duty was to keep their athletic master in good physical condition, slept on good straw pallets in a comfortable hut. Cleander turned to Marcia:

"Is there no lamp here? Can you light it? As soon as Simon brings pen and ink I will write your manumission. That will save you from Vulpes in any event; it will make you legally free, even if there isn't time to take you before the praetor and confirm it. And if there is nothing in this fear of Vulpes' treachery, no matter, since I had intended to set you free on my birthday. It comes a little sooner, that is all."

"Oh, Cleander! If your vision were only as perfect as your virtue! Why have I not Paulus' eloquence, that I might give you faith in Paulus' teachings of eternal life?"

"Eternal life, I think, would be a bore," he answered. "Even old age is a bore. Imagine an eternity of that—growing older and older! No, no. I enjoy some phases of existence, such as loving you, and being generous and virile. I enjoy being just, or I would certainly be unjust. And I loathe some other phases, such as breathing the same air with swine like Vulpes, and saluting such an animal as Caesar, on whom any man of character would sooner spit. On the whole, I believe I will greet death rather tolerantly when it comes. A moment's agony, perhaps, and after that, eternity of nothing. I shall not even miss you, Marcia; there will be nothing of me left with which to miss you."

SIMON came, and with him, Giton and the gladiators, Giton fussily concerned and the gladiators wide-eyed with curiosity, their coppery bodies sheening in the lamp-light. Cleander wrote Simon's permit.

"There is nothing to worry about, Giton."

"Oh, there is—there is!" said Marcia. And that loosed Giton's tongue:

"Most generous master, if you are ac-

cused of being a Christian, or even of favoring Christians, they will torture all of us for evidence against you."

Simon had grown speechless; he mistrusted the four gladiators, having had lots of experience of men of that dreaded profession. Even his gestures were restrained, but he frowned at Giton as at a fool who lacked discretion. However, Giton had responsibilities, which Simon had not:

"Is it true," he asked, "that Lucius Verres Vulpes lost to you five hundred thousand sesterces, which he is to pay in the morning?"

"Yes, true," Cleander answered. He was busy writing. "Is there anything in that to disturb you, of all people? Haven't you bedeviled me for money all this past year? In the morning, you will have half a million with which to pay my debts and—by the way, take care that when Vulpes comes to pay me we treat him courteously. I might forget myself unless reminded."

"Master! Must you stay to meet him? I can be here to receive the money; that is a steward's duty."

"What do you want me to do?" Cleander had a disconcerting way of asking that, although he almost never took advice when Giton gave it.

"Go to Rome, master! Go now. Get Caesar's ear, before it is too late. Go now, and break the spokes of Vulpes' wheel—before he breaks you, chariot and all!"

"Not a bad thought, Giton. Here, Marcia my dear, accept your manumission. Bear witness, all of you, that with this document I now set Marcia free. Simon, you are a free man; can you write your name? Well, never mind; bear witness. Marcia, be free."

There were formalities—sudden—emotional—Marcia on her knees to kiss Cle-

ander's hands. The gladiators expected gifts from Marcia's peculium, it being reckoned wise to share good fortune so that when the inevitable day of ill luck comes there may be friends to share that also. But the manumission had been unexpected and Marcia had no money with her, so Cleander relieved her embarrassment at the extended right hands and the greedy grins:

"Give them what is customary, Giton, out of my purse. And now, Giton, for once I will take your advice, because it happens to agree with my own. And besides, to make that manumission absolutely legal, I should take Marcia before the praetor and record it. I will leave for Rome at daybreak. Get me together what money I have, and pack me enough clothing for a week or ten days; getting audience with Caesar is not always done in a moment."

DO IT swiftly, master—swiftly! Use bribes, but be economical, otherwise they will keep you waiting all the longer, to extort more bribes. Browbeat all the underlings and give them nothing. Then, when you reach the assistant chamberlain, make no bones about it but drive your bargain. Ask him, how much? And when he tells you, offer him about the half of what he demands. He will be insulted, but he will gladly compromise for two thirds. Then promise him the other third—afterwards—provided that the audience goes well. Then he will speak to Caesar's women, who will drop hints, and Caesar will be predisposed in your favor."

"Very well, Giton. Simon, will you wait and travel with me?"

"Not I—not if I can help it, excellent Cleander! I am a poor man, who can ill afford to be seen with one who is perhaps to be accused of who knows what. I

would be grateful for the loan of the gladiators as far as the door of the inn, and a mile beyond it. If they awaken the innkeeper he will make no trouble for me. And when my own porters take over the loads, and we march away with gladiators guarding us, the robbers who sleep at the inn will believe we are well protected; so they will not follow. I will send the gladiators back a long time before daylight."

"Very well, Simon. Farewell, and be prosperous. Go and attend to the packing, Giton. Don't send too many servants with me; I will stay at the house of Fabius Arbiter, who is always hospitable, even at a moment's notice, but has not much room for an extra retinue. —And now, Marcia—as a freedwoman—do you love me—or am I —?"

"Cleander, I know not what to think, or say, or do! I only know I love you with every breath I breathe."

"Make music then. Sing me one of those curious Christian hymns. I am in a curious mood."

"We might be overheard. Are you not afraid, Cleander?"

"I am afraid of nothing—except, perhaps, of having to bend my stiff neck before Caligula. Have you a song that makes such exercises seem becoming to a man of my temperament?"

CHAPTER III

"Only men in trouble visit Rome."

GITON the steward gloomed and shuddered, saying the omens were unpropitious. Birds had flown too low at daybreak. A slave had smashed a clay lamp.

"Whip the slave, and net the birds for dinner," Cleander retorted. If he must go and humble himself before Caligula,

that was no reason why he should let superstition trouble him. He had his own ideas of dignity and of what made life worth living. "Get out the litter for Marcia."

"But master, it is unlawful for a freedwoman to ride in a litter. You will only make more trouble for yourself."

"A little more won't matter. Argue with me, Giton, and I will have her ride to Rome on horseback."

Even Marcia protested, but Cleander had his own way, though he would have resented another man's freedwoman traveling like a lady of rank. It was a case of inconsistent obstinacy that would have made him laugh if he had really thought about it. As it was, it served to bolster up his recklessness. He led the way on horseback; pack-mules followed with the luggage, and then the slave-borne litter with its red crushed-leather curtains, guarded by four gladiators, trudging two on either hand. Thinking of arrogant phrases with which to browbeat the guard at the city gate if they should dare to question Marcia's rank; and what with the glorious weather, and the thought that Giton presently would pay his debts with Vulpes' money, Cleander grew more and more cheerful until they reached the execution place, at a crossroads, on rising ground within a furlong of the city wall. There was a small inn near by where breakfasted the soldiers, whose duty it was to see that no living victims were removed from the gibbets. Only a few slaves writhed in torment, although there was nearly an acre of crucifixes occupied by ravens waiting for their meal of festered carrion.

That changed his mood again. As a Roman, he was hardly squeamish; and he knew what drastic means are some-

times needed if a hundred thousand free-men are to keep in subjection four times their number of slaves. But there was something horribly contemptible about that shambles. It made him loathe life. He was angry by the time he noticed Simon Unoculus in the dust near the door of the inn. They had beaten the Jew and taken away his bales of leopard skins; his porters were carrying water to fill a great clay cistern for the soldiers' bath.

"Worshipful Cleander, they refused even to read your honor's letter. They accused me of being a thief, and a run-away slave, and I know not what else. I am beaten until my bones are powder."

So Cleander again earned Simon's gratitude. There was only a decurion in charge of that execution guard—a man of merely eight or ten years' service who had not yet learned the sort of iron insolence centurions achieve. He wilted under the flail of Cleander's vehemence. He even begged Simon's pardon. He restored his loads. He paid his porters for the trifle of carrying water. He pressed wine on Simon, and a gift of reeking cheese and too-ripe olives. He implored Cleander not to report him to his legion commander. He was voluble, penitent; not worth vengeance; a mere coward turned into a bully by the sight of writhing victims. And all Simon said was:

"Good Cleander, may I live to recompense you."

But Marcia used her skill on Simon's bruises, so Simon had word with her, while Cleander persuaded the decurion to go and cut the throats of the crucified slaves before the sun should get strong enough to make their torment unimaginable. It was none of Cleander's business. It was even an act of contempt of Roman law. Expression of

contempt is a luxury against which there are subtly self-enforcing penalties that no man ever wrote into a statute book. The stinking purlieus of the city gate increased and fed contempt and he was primed now—ready for the dangerous gratification of insulting the guards at the gate if they should dare to so much as notice Marcia.

BUT because Marcia loved him, and Simon had repaid kindness with a little whispered advice, she deceived Cleander. In the crowd outside the gate, where the rough guards bullied peasants and the lines of laden slaves poured in and out, she stepped down from the litter and walked behind it, through the gate, on foot. Safely inside the city she climbed in again, and Cleander never knew he had not successfully defied the sumptuary laws of Rome.

His was the disgust of a young philosopher who felt that the most important city in the world should be a decent place to live in, but who could not see how to make it so. The narrow lanes resembled sewers pouring streams of human riff-raff into sunlit spaces where plundered foreign marbles shouldered wooden busts of yesterday's mob-orators and splendid buildings stood wedged between reeking tenements. Yelling tradesmen stormed and chattered. Black slaves, standing on barrels, bellowed forth the alleged amusement to be had in stenching brothels. Blood-smeared butchers, shouldering newly quartered beef, struggled for right of way against tides of laden slaves amid the booths of vegetable sellers. Din—savage laughter—brawling—money changers, testing coin by coin the debased, clipped currency.

A cohort of praetorian guardsmen clanked down-street, led by a centurion who almost looked like an old time Ro-

man, save for a sly uncertainty about his eyes. Two Vestal Virgins on some unimaginable errand, preceded by lictors who caused twice the commotion the guardsmen did. A tenement on fire; dogs and children chasing the evicted rats; slaves of the municipium, armed with pikes and ladders, withstanding all attempts to save surrounding buildings while their officer made his bargain with the owners. A magistrate's court, and the screams of a tortured witness, with women and children peering through the narrow windows for a glimpse of someone's agony, while armed guards leaned on their spears outside and joked with one another.

Fabius Arbiter's house at last, at the end of a *cul-de-sac* near the Saepta Julia, fronting on a small tiled courtyard and protected by a high wall. A Nubian slave at the gate gave ample warning; Fabius Arbiter came hurrying through the vestibule to greet Cleander midway of the courtyard and embrace him.

"Welcome, and welcome again." He took him by the shoulders. "But what brings you? Only men in trouble visit Rome; only criminals, paupers and madmen remain here. By the Genius of Caesar—that is the only safe oath nowadays—if I could sell my house for a fair price, I would look for less undignified annoyances in Gaul or Egypt. However, enter. All that I have is yours."

CHAPTER IV

"There is no use in arguing with a love-struck man."

ARBITER'S was an old fashioned house, partly altered and redecorated, built around a central atrium that could be protected by a canvas awning drawn on ropes. As a young widower

of moderate means he lived without much regularity and his slaves showed the lack of a feminine hand to control them; such women as sometimes visited the house were likelier than not to loosen discipline, and the steward was an Egyptian with Alexandrian ideas of extravagance, so that with Arbiter, as with Cleander, debt was a normal condition. There were luxuries, whether or not they were paid for.

They sprawled on couches in the atrium, with a breakfast table between them and a wine-slave in attendance; but the slave was presently dismissed while Cleander told his story.

"What a man will not do for a woman!" said Arbiter. "And you say Marcia is a Christian? At the moment that is your principal danger. We are beginning to be really disturbed about the Christians, because of the risk of another slave war; and Caligula is especially angry with them because someone told him that the Christians say it is wicked to try to make gold from arsenic, which is his obsession just now. They rounded up some Christians for him, and he made them swallow arsenic, to show him what they could do with it. On the other hand, he has equally monstrous moods of an opposite sort. You know the Christians are supposed to practice necromancy? Yes they do, I tell you. Nine tenths of their talk is of raising the dead. Well—when the informers told that to Caligula, in the hope that for a change he might get after the Christians and leave the rest of us to our own devices, he disappointed them. He said, 'We will see if they can raise the dead. I will give them plenty of Romans to practice on.' There is never any guessing what surprise Caligula will spring next."

"Nevertheless, I must have an audi-

ence with him. How else shall I forestall Vulpes?"

"I can get you an audience. I stand well with Caesar's chamberlain. But remember the name Caligula and drive the thought of Caesar from your mind. He is not Caesar. He is a madman who uses a Caesar's opportunities and preys off Roman cowardice and we are all such cowards that we can't get rid of him, and he heaps one imposition upon another. He invites the moon to sleep with him, to say nothing of senators' wives, whose husbands have to smile and tell him they are greatly honored. He has set his statue in the temples, next to those of the gods. He has made his horse a consul. If he hears a man has money, his only concern is how to confiscate it. He is money-crazy. Yes, I can get you an audience, but—"

"How else shall I protect myself from Vulpes?"

"True! True! Vulpes is a very dangerous informer, who has been useful to Caligula. Informers are about the only people whose lives and possessions seem absolutely safe. You would better have your audience, because Caligula may take a momentary liking to you. His likes never last long; only his dislikes appear permanent. But that won't be enough. We must use backstairs influence as well. Has Vulpes not an enemy or two? I must find out. I know a woman who might help us—Chloe—a contractors' slave—a bad devil if ever there was one, but clever; if she is in Rome I will have her sent here. Now and then she takes part in the palace orgies. She might whisper to Vulpes' enemies that his estates are well worth confiscating. Perhaps, too, she will be able to think of something else. We will have to pay her master handsomely. Well, go to your room and get some sleep, Cleander.

I will send for Chloe and I will send word, too, to the praetor's office that we will call there to manumit a slave on our way to the *thermae* this afternoon. But by the way: warn Marcia to keep her mouth shut in the praetor's office. My man Ossianus says he saw a she-slave manumitted not long since, and the fool knelt down and praised Christ in the praetor's presence. She was crucified, of course. What else could the praetor do? Tell Marcia to hold her tongue."

IN a room where painted Fauns pursued Nymphs on the stucco walls and a voluptuous looking Venus leered down from the ceiling, Cleander slept considerably longer than he had intended. He was awakened by the sound of wrestling. In the atrium, Fabius Arbiter was vainly striving to put Cleander's gladiator Spicillus on his back; Cleander watched his chance and threw them both into the fountain, to save his friend from the embarrassment of failure. They fooled for a while. Then Cleander took wooden sword and buckler and fought Thrax, his favorite, promising the man five sesterces for every blow that he could strike home with edge or point; but Thrax earned nothing, though they strove until master and man were bathed in sweat and Arbiter said it was time for the *thermae*.

"The aediles—asses!—say that to light up the baths after dusk might lead to immorality. The result is, darkness sees men and women flitting out of the place like bats to go and be immoral elsewhere. What is it that makes aediles idiots? And what is immorality? Don't answer, because I'm sure you don't know. Tell me something you do know. How did you ever learn how to drub such a swordsman as Thrax? I tried him before I tried to wrestle with Spicillus. I can handle a sword better than most men

of my age, but I couldn't touch him and he landed on me as he pleased."

"Speed," Cleander answered. "That's the secret of it. I wish I could put such speed into my business with Vulpes. Learn from the animals, Fabius. A quick blow is worth two slow ones. A quick thrust, followed thrice as quickly by another, then another—Hercules! I grudge the time we are to squander at the *thermae*."

"Ingrate! In the *thermae* we will do your business. Let your gladiators follow us and protect Marcia; that girl is too good looking."

Two of Arbiter's servants followed also. Suitably cloaked to avoid attention, Marcia followed midst six men to the praetor's office, where the gladiators forced an opening through the crowd that was reading posted notices and clamoring for access to the office that was guarded by red-cloaked lictors. There was more business to be done by that one office than could have been handled by all the offices in Rome, and there was a swarm of lawyers who specialized in getting precedence for claims of one sort or another. However, Arbiter had influence enough to force his way in and the ceremony of manumission was soon over. In the presence of a bored assistant of the praetor he turned Marcia around three times, pushed her away from him and said, 'Go free, Marcia, I manumit you.' The assistant recorded the act in a file, a fee changed hands, and there was a short delay while Marcia's certificate of freedom was sent into another room for the praetor's signature. But the delay was fraught with an incident that made Fabius Arbiter bite his finger nails, although Cleander thought nothing of it.

A slightly built, gray-bearded Jew with lustrous eyes was led into the room. His

name was announced as Paulus. He was chained to an ex-legionary who wore the badge of the praetor's office, and who seemed, not exactly afraid of his prisoner, but remarkably deferent to him. The official showed impatience:

"I am tired of you, Paulus."

"May the Lord relieve your weariness," the prisoner answered; and he had a voice that disarmed irritation. "But I think that neither you nor I can be as weary as this good fellow must be of the useless chain that makes him more a prisoner than me."

THE official fell back on bureaucratic arrogance. "Such a complaint is insolence. You are fortunate not to be held in the dungeon."

"Fortunate indeed," said Paulus.

"I only wish Caesar would appoint a day for your trial—and to the lions with you! Only Jupiter himself could say what secret influence you have. A Christian—are you not a Christian?"

"I have made no secret of it," Paulus answered.

"Christians have been crucified in dozens. They have been thrown to the lions in dozens. Nevertheless, you, who are the ringleader of them all, are allowed to wander where you please—"

"Provided I report here frequently," said Paulus. "I have wronged no man by remarking that this chain is even more troublesome to the guard than to me. I will not seek to escape. I came to Rome because I appealed to Caesar, having that right, being a Roman citizen. I will await my turn for Caesar's judgment."

"Meanwhile, preaching to runaway slaves and criminals in catacombs and tombs and such-like hiding places?"

"Do they not need the Word of the Spirit that altars men's hearts and minds?"

"Perverting them with eastern doctrine that makes them traitors, worthy of no other fate than death in the arena!"

Paulus smiled at him. His eyes, and his smile, and the confident calm of his persuasive shoulders were as eloquent as his voice. "You say, they are criminals," he answered. "Would your law, then, spare them in any event? Then do I wrong them, or the law, if I persuade them of eternal life?"

"Oh, go your way," the official answered. "It is a mystery to me that you were not tried and executed long ago. No, I will not remove the chain. I have no authority to do that. If I might, I would not. Go your way."

He turned to attend to the business of important citizens and Paulus led rather than followed his custodian toward the door. But on his way Marcia interrupted him. She knelt, and Paulus blessed her, touching her bowed head with his right hand.

Outside, on the edge of the crowd, hugging her certificate of freedom, Marcia blessed Cleander, as she had right to do, and as convention obliged that she should. There were no words too extravagant, nor any place too public, for the gratitude of a slave set free.

"Oh generous Cleander—"

However, Arbiter interrupted. "Just the very thing I warned you to beware of! Justus Cassius and Cornelius Varro were in the praetor's office. They saw her kneel to that Jew. Cassius is one of Caligula's backstairs panders, and Varro is about the vilest spy in Rome! Get rid of the woman—tell her to go and hide before she gets us all in trouble."

"She has nowhere to go," said Cleander. The thought of losing sight of Marcia disturbed him more than danger did.

"Nonsense. Give the girl some money. Give it to her now—don't argue." He

turned on Marcia: "Listen. Understand this: it is the law that no slave may be manumitted to avoid her giving evidence against her master. If Virgilius Cleander should be charged with an offense against the State, your manumission would be canceled and you would be tortured, just like any other slave, for evidence against him."

"I would not give evidence against him. I would rather die," said Marcia. "And besides, he has done no wrong to anyone."

"Who cares? Let them catch you, and then see what happens! Hide, I tell you, until we know what Vulpes has contrived against Cleander. When we have defeated Vulpes, come back."

CLEANDER protested, but Arbiter stuck to his point and Marcia had no option but to do what she was told. Cleander gave her money and, in spite of Arbiter's objections, ordered two of his gladiators to escort her to whatever hiding place she might decide on; they were to return to Arbiter's house with news of her whereabouts, and to take more money to her as soon as she should need it.

"Dangerous! However, there is no use in arguing with a love-struck man, said Arbiter. "I have yet to hear of a gladiator who could keep a secret. In or out of the arena they are good for nothing except their own grim trade; and they would be no good for that unless the penalty for flinching were worse than the chances they have to take. Your gladiators follow Marcia—someone will follow and watch the gladiators—wait and see."

"I think you are unduly nervous," said Cleander.

"Am I? Well, don't you be nervous in the *thermae*. Flaminius Glaucus, Caligula's chamberlain, will be there and I

intend to introduce you to him. He is usually in a vicious temper until after he has been scraped down with the strigil, so let us hope we catch him in the tepidarium, well oiled and for the time being almost human. And by the way, when you take off your clothes in the cloakroom and the slave gives you a token for them, give the blackguard an *as* for himself and threaten him with mayhem; otherwise you will get the wrong clothes back and have no remedy. I don't know where they find such shameless thieves as they employ in the *thermae* cloakroom."

CHAPTER V

"Chloe is quite an experience."

"OBSERVE," said Arbiter, as they threaded their way through the crowd of slaves outside the *thermae*. "Everybody's slaves, eh? Everybody's secrets being told. Inside, the masters who make the scandal and the mistresses who cause it; outside, the servants who multiply rumor. How long do you think it will be before you and Marcia are hot news?"

However, he threw off gloom inside the *thermae*. Everybody did. The sheer physical comfort of leaving one's clothes in care of the attendant and strolling naked amid tiled luxury where, at least for the moment, there were no social distinctions, had a peculiar mental effect on Romans. The right of entry was a zealously guarded social privilege, the more appreciated since, once inside, all were more nearly equal than anywhere else in Rome.

"I don't know whether we are wise or not to admit women," Arbiter remarked as they strolled into the tepidarium and stood on the marble brink of the plunge. Around all four sides of the great room

was a colonnade, beneath which men and women strolled like gods and goddesses, the sheer grace of the Roman stride and gesture, and the broken light that filtered through thick glass making even corpulent shapes look beautiful. "It is possibly good for the women, since it may make them understand us better; and the act of walking naked among naked men obliges them to practice modesty. Nevertheless, I think I liked it better when they were not admitted."

Certainly it made for decency and self-restraint. A man who stared, or a woman who appeared self-conscious would have been promptly excluded and never allowed to return. There was a valuable atmosphere of mutual tolerance, and of comradeship between the sexes, that existed nowhere else in Rome.

THEY plunged, swam the length of the pool a time or two, and strolled into the tepidarium, deciding to omit the usual routine of sweating and being scraped and rubbed, because Flaminius Glaucus was in the tepidarium, holding a court of his own on a marble seat within one of the arched alcoves. He was being flattered and regaled with gossip, but he looked bored, although his crocodilish eyes glanced with swift interest and appraisal at each new arrival. He was an athletic man himself—or rather, had been, and he instantly noticed Cleander's muscular physique and seemed pleased when Arbiter came near to introduce him. He had, too, a marvelous gift for dismissing men who had a perfect right to remain where they were if they wished; it was only a few moments before he, Arbiter and Cleander had the alcove to themselves.

"How now, Arbiter? Tell me about your friend. He wants something, of course, all do, who get themselves intro-

duced to me. If he doesn't want my post as chamberlain, such a handsome fellow may have anything I can do for him—in reason—mind you, I said, in reason. Come now, what does he want?"

"An audience with Caesar."

Who is he, you say? The son of—oh yes, I remember; let me write that on my tablet. But why an audience? Caesar detests them, since he has to endure so many. However much he might otherwise like a man, he always hates him at an audience. What does Cleander want with Caesar?"

"Good standing, that is all," said Arbiter. "How else shall a man establish his position?"

"True. True. What else has he besides breeding and good looks to recommend him?"

"He writes poems. I have never read them, but—"

"Neither will Caesar read them. Can he talk intelligently? Has he humor?"

"He can converse," said Arbiter, "like a son of Aspasia by Pericles."

"A very dangerous ability! However, he seems also to have a gift of silence. And a new, good looking face—how long, Arbiter, since you were at Caesar's dinner-table?"

"More than a year. I can't afford such privileges. The last occasion cost me more than two months' income in gifts to assistant chamberlains."

"Assistant chamberlains must live. You should have pressed your opportunity and reimbursed yourself by means of Caesar's favor. However, opportunities recur. It happens that two members of the senate lost their heads last night; or, at least, I suppose they lost them; they were ordered to be tortured first. 'Let them feel themselves die,' said Caesar. But they were not the type of men who can endure prolonged pain. And they were fools.

They are not, perhaps, worth mentioning except that they serve to point a moral. Did you know them? Tullius Faltonius and Lucius Salinator."

"By sight," said Arbiter. "Did not Salinator marry quite recently?"

"Yes, that was the beginning of it. Salinator invited Caesar to the wedding. Caesar admired the wife and took her home with him; but he did not enjoy her much, she was too readily complaisant, so he banished her to one of the islands, I forget which. Salinator thought he had better remove from Caesar's mind any suspicion that he might be feeling resentful, so he and his friend Faltonius sought an audience. They thought they had caught Caesar in a mood to be beguiled by abject flattery."

"Isn't flattery what he demands?" asked Arbiter.

"He likes it subtle. Faltonius asked him, would it not be better to abolish all law than to have to be constantly changing it? Caesar was silent; he sat leaning on his elbow with his right hand covering his mouth and his head moving slowly from side to side, the way he always does when his mood is deadly. However, that fool Salinator piped up: 'Let the world know that all of us live and manage our affairs at Caesar's sole caprice.' Caesar smiled then. I knew what was coming. 'I have a caprice now,' he remarked, and he summoned the guards. 'You wish to see me so disliked that the Roman mob will tear me into pieces. I will teach you what that feels like.' He followed them out, to make sure that slaves were not substituted for them. That has been done, you know; they peel the slave's face to make it unrecognizable. Caesar enjoyed Salinator's agony so much that he has been in a good mood ever since. I want to keep him in a good mood."

"And the moral?"

"There are several. One is, that if Caesar takes your wife or your mistress, don't try to presume on the strength of it. Ignore the incident. Forget the woman. Another is, never suggest to Caesar a course of conduct; he can think of quite enough disturbing novelties without anyone's assistance. And a third is, that the easiest way to arouse his suspicion, which is the same thing as his deadly enmity, is to try to avoid doing it. Now it happens that those two fools were bidden to tomorrow's banquet. How would you two like to take their places?"

CLEANDER and Arbiter glanced at each other—glances that did not escape Flaminus Glaucus, court chamberlains being nothing if not observant. He read, and understood their hesitation, so he went on:

"Caesar is growing weary and suspicious of his present intimates. He is secretly very nervous about plots against his life. He may take a fancy to you two youngsters. Who knows? So I will set down your names now and you shall have your formal invitations in the morning. I think it is a bright idea; you may serve, so to speak, to counterbalance the effect of one of those dreadful people whom one can't avoid inviting now and then. There is a man named—"

He was interrupted by a slave who brought a whispered message that sent him hurrying to be dressed and gone, clutching his tablets and muttering imprecations.

"Now," exclaimed Arbiter, grinning wryly, "we are in for it. The next thing is to—"

He had no time to continue just then. Men who had never thought him worth consideration, and who did not even know Cleander's name, pressed forward to ingratiate themselves with two such for-

tunates as had the private ear of Caesar's chamberlain. It was hard work to escape them without making enemies. They were followed to the cloakroom. Three men even followed to the street and, by offering their company on the way home on the excuse that the streets were unsafe after dark, tried to get themselves invited to Arbiter's house for the evening meal.

"Thanks," said Arbiter, "we have two gladiators and our servants. And besides, we have an assignation."

That excuse was valid. Everyone knew the details of everyone else's love affairs, but it was good form, nevertheless, to go through the outward gestures of observing secrecy. So, arm-in-arm, the two walked home alone, protected by their servants.

"You will miss your Marcia tonight," said Arbiter, "but never mind. I have sent for Chloe, who will probably amuse you. She has been out of Rome on some debauch or other, but her master promised to send her to my house this evening. Use her well, because she is the ablest backstairs intriguer in Rome and she will do anything—literally anything, for a man she likes. The thing for you to do, is so to endear Chloe to you that she will whisper in Caesar's women's ears, and in the ears of his eunuchs and bedroom slaves. She must do all that not later than tomorrow afternoon, so that when Caesar finds you at his dinner table he will be already predisposed in your favor. However, let me have the first talk with her—alone is better. I will explain to her what is expected, promise her a big reward for herself in addition to her master's fee for her services, and I will sing your praises to her. You do the rest."

"I will try," said Cleander.

"Nonsense! Are you so love-sick for Marcia that you can't amuse yourself with Chloe to preserve your own neck? Let me tell you, Chloe is quite an experi-

ence. There isn't a worse devil or a more amusing baggage in Rome, and she can talk and joke more entertainingly than any honest woman in the world—supposing, I mean, that there were such a thing as an honest woman. She knows everybody's secrets. She knows all the scandal. And she has brains. So mind you rise to the occasion."

CLEANDER went to his own room, rather gloomily, wondering where Marcia was and trying to make himself look forward to the opportunity of worsting Vulpes by obtaining Caesar's favor. He detested the thought of bowing his stiff neck in Caesar's presence. He would vastly have preferred, if that were possible, to leave the whole intrigue in Chloe's hands; whatever he might have to pay her and her Alexandrian owner would be cheap as the price of avoiding the humiliation of having to ingratiate himself with such a monster as Caligula was said to be. Cleander's pride was about the only thing he dreaded losing, and he told himself that, were it not for Marcia, he would keep the pride and let the fortune go. He wondered whether Marcia would turn out to be worth it after all.

"Freedom sometimes makes the best of them ungrateful. And hers is a strange superstition. Who knows what a Christian will do when placed in a dilemma? Am I a madman? Well—"

A servant summoned him to drink an appetizer with his host beside the lamp-lit fountain in the atrium. He shrugged away his gloom and strode forth, his artistic eye observing the slim, supple figure of a Greek slave girl who stood answering Arbiter's questions.

"This is Chloe," said Arbiter. "Let us take our cups and let her pour the wine; she will inspire it with Hellenic zest."

Chloe took the wine jar in her hands

and turned as gracefully as a bramble swaying in the wind. Cleander almost gasped. She was the woman who had followed him from Fastidius Flaccus' house, and who had cursed him in Flaccus' garden because he had told her to go and offer her obscenities to Vulpes. She smiled as mischievously sweetly as if they shared a good joke.

"I have told her all about your feud with Vulpes and what you and I expect of her," said Arbiter.

CHAPTER VI

"Love me—and let tomorrow bring forth what it may!"

SHE was an artist in her own way, Chloe. She enjoyed Cleander's consternation, and let him know she did. Nevertheless, her attitude was perfectly respectful and she left it to Cleander to decide whether or not to try to make his peace with her. Meanwhile, as a hired out entertainer, she was obviously pleased to sing, dance, gossip and be complaisant. Alexandria had taught Rome what to expect from dancing girls and Chloe followed the two friends into the dining room with the air of being soul and body at their service and delighted to oblige them.

For a while, as they reclined on couches and the slaves brought wine and viands fit for far more wealthy men than those two, she sang to them, plucking a strange stringed instrument. Her songs were chaste and lyrical; her voice was low, well trained and pleasing. Told by Arbiter to make herself at ease, she reclined on a heap of cushions and presented an apparently unstudied picture of rather experienced innocence. She could not have been less than thirty years old, and the life she had been trained and forced to

lead would have taxed a lioness' strength, yet, dim light favoring perhaps, she looked no more than twenty-two or -three; and though she had come that day from entertaining Flaccus and his friends, she looked gay and tireless. If she tried to listen to the conversation, she gave no sign of it; and as long as she sang, there was not much risk of her overhearing Cleander's low voiced comments on the situation.

"Has she spoken with anyone other than you?"

"Undoubtedly. She came in through the servants' entrance."

"And you say she is bad?"

"There is not a worse devil in Rome."

A sort of pride stirred Arbiter as he admitted that. By no means every Roman knew the ins and outs of life so well that he could summon Chloë for the service of his guest.

"You have told her about Vulpes? She has very likely spoken to my gladiators. And she may have learned that Marcia is in hiding. We are undone, my friend, before we begin. Unless—" He paused, because her song ceased.

"Sing again," said Arbiter.

"Unless you know some way of—"

"Two ways," said Arbiter, "love her or kill her."

"If she has the brains you intimate she has, then she understands perfectly that I am telling you why she is my enemy."

"You have not yet told me."

CLEANDER described the incident in Flaccus' garden. "I told her to take her blandishments to Vulpes, and she very likely did. What more natural than that Vulpes should have commissioned her to betray me by some means or other? She was as angry as a kicked she-wolf. She knew Vulpes is my enemy. She probably went straight to him and offered herself as an ally against me."

"Cleander—whom the gods would ruin, it is true they first make mad. Are you so young and innocent that you parade your virtue before a dancing girl? Oh, Vanity, what next? Have you not learned that such as she must think us lecherous and despicable, even if we are not, otherwise they set to work at once to make us so; and if they fail they hate us to the death? Dioscuri! She has learned, I suppose, about Marcia being a Christian?"

"Vulpes will have told her that. He accused me of the same thing."

"Jupiter! You will need omniscience, my friend, to get you out of this mess. True, I have a small ergastulum, but if I should imprison her, her owner would be here by noon to find out why she has not returned to him. Her services are usually spoken for a week or ten days in advance. Caligula's master of ceremonies may have engaged her for tomorrow night. I know her sort; if we should beat or bribe her she would agree to anything, and betray us with the next breath. No, Cleander, you have one chance. You must make her love you."

"If she were a child I might," Cleander answered. "But she is a grown woman. If I should feign love, she would see through that and hate me all the more."

"It is either that, or kill her," Arbiter advised, "or else she will destroy you. You might order Thrax to break her neck and throw her into the street for the slaves of the municipium to carry away at daybreak. But the worst of that is, that her owner is a Roman citizen—a spiteful fellow with an Alexandrian's intelligence. She cost him an enormous sum of money and is a good investment. He would set enquiries going and would presently sue one or other of us for her value. He would have the right to post a bond of indemnity in case of destruction of their market value and then order our slaves

tortured before the magistrate for evidence against us. And you know what gladiators are. Under torture Thrax would tell the truth and add to it. On the other hand, if you should send Thrax to the country that would be regarded as suspicious; and even if they should never be able to produce Thrax, they would torture your other servants, who would—Go on singing, Chloe."

"No, her singing irritates me," said Cleander. "I will talk to her. Let her come and sit here between us."

ANOTHER slave brought cushions. Chloe curled on them between the couches, chastely unchaste, eager to entertain them both or to be a bone of contention between them, whichever course

events might indicate. Cleander studied her a long while, until at last he held his wine cup for a slave to fill and passed it to her.

"Drink, girl."

"My name is Chloe," she said smiling, answering his gaze over the brim of the cup. But she only sipped the wine.

"Chloe, did you ever forgive anyone in all your life?" Cleander asked her.

"No. How should I? Slaves have no forgiveness to give to anyone. I was slave-born. Who would want my forgiveness—saying that I had it in my gift? What I am—what I can—what I do—is for hire. And I am worth the money."

"Do you mean I can buy your interest?"

"I have none for sale. I am a slave. I work in my master's interest."



"My name is Chloe," she said smiling—over the brim of the cup.

"And your owner—?"

"Hires me to the highest bidder."

"I am not a rich man. I can not afford to bid high," said Cleander. "However, I know that my enemy Vulpes has persuaded you to help him to destroy me. And I know you hate me because I treated you without much consideration the other night. You are probably quite justified in hating me. It is not my habit to be insolent to men or women who are not entitled to retaliate, but I forgot myself that night because of mixed emotions. What I wish to learn is, how to make such amends as you consider suitable; and how to get you to work for me, not Vulpes. Tell me."

Chloe showed him her beautiful teeth, in a smile that was worthy of Leda seducing the swan. "You are the handsomest man I have ever seen, most marvelous Cleander!"

"Let us forget that for a moment."

"How can I forget it when you have shoulders like Apollo and arms like Zeus himself, O lover of lovers, O—"

"Listen to me," said Cleander.

"Thou whose voice is like the warm wind calling forth the scented blossom on Hymettus!"

"I am calling forth your better nature, Chloe."

"Humming happiness, as bees amid the blossom, Chloe is already yours. And the night is young; why waste it speaking of unpleasant things? O glorious Cleander, such a torso as you have—such muscles—such thighs of sculpted marble! Did Praxiteles carve you out of Parian stone, O stoney-hearted one? You speak to Chloe of forgiveness? You with such lips as can tempt her to die for the bliss of enjoying them! You—"

"It is of death I would speak," said Cleander. "I have a friend—"

"I doubt not that the whole world loves you."

"I have a friend who would avenge me on the body of my betrayer."

"Friends die also; it is only life that is worth thinking about—life while it lasts," said Chloe. "Love me, and let tomorrow bring forth what it may."

STRANGE, gray-iron notions held Cleander in a grip that he felt no wish to break. He was no more virginal in thought or deed than any other Roman, but his pride stirred strongly and contempt, which is an unwise impulse, smiled along the thin line of his lips. By law and immemorial custom Marcia, whom he had set free, nevertheless was almost more his than she had been; gratitude and a kind of freedom both gave dignity to what the law of ownership had merely licensed. The weird, un-Roman, unconventional idea played with him and pleased him, that he was bound to Marcia as much as Marcia to him. And the good, old-Roman manhood in him rigidly refused to risk his dignity in Chloe's arms. Daylight would find her as free as ever to serve Vulpes and to whisper calumnies up palace backstairs; she would probably take exquisite delight in the double treachery. However, he knew that Arbiter would urge him to accept that risk; and he did not care to speak, even with Arbiter, about the veiled, dim Christian ideals that he had mocked with tolerant good humor but that actually, he knew, made Marcia something dearer to him than a boughten bed-mate. It was disagreeable to analyze his motives. So he rode rash impulse—gave full rein to contempt that he knew he should have been too proud to feel.

"Hands off me!" he commanded, frowning. "Again I tell you: you may take your blandishments to Vulpes. He

may value them. As for your hatred of me, I prefer it to the thought of accepting favors from you."

Arbiter's lips moved, framing the words that leaped to them: "You idiot!" But he made no sound; he was watching Chloe scramble to her feet and by sheer will power mask such hatred as almost turns breath into viperous mist. She backed away and stooped for her stringed instrument.

Then suddenly, beside the screen that concealed the service door, stood Ajax, the least pleasing of Cleander's gladiators—a great-shouldered man with hairy legs and eyes too closely set. And Chloe's self restraint broke down; she let escape one damning sarcasm that convicted her once and for all of having used her charms on the gladiators in the kitchen.

"He brings you tidings of your Marcia."

Arbiter summoned his steward. "Turn her out of the house!"

The steward bowed. "But it was stipulated in the terms of hire that if dismissed by night she should not be sent home unprotected. Whom, sir, shall I send with her?"

"Take her away. I will tell you presently. Meanwhile, let her talk to no one. Send the other servants from the room and let Ajax approach."

Ajax told his story bluntly. "Marcia found that one-eyed Jew named Simon, who directed her to a house in a street where armorers ply their trade. She drove her bargain and found lodging with a maker of tents. There we left her and returned hither by a round-about way, as your honor commanded."

"Are the wine shops open at this hour?" Cleander wondered. He could smell the man's breath. "Where is Murex?"

"In the servants' quarters. He has colic."

"Too drunk to stand up, I suppose. If you men can't go on a simple errand without guzzling wine in every den you pass, I shall have to sell you for the arena. Wait outside the door until I send for you again."

ARBITER finished the wine in the goblet in front of him, draining it to the last drop. "You are quite right," he said, nodding. "It is the only thing to do. Send Ajax, and let Ajax kill her in some dark corner; afterwards he can say that she gave him the slip to go wantoning on her own account. If she should live until the morning she will inform against you as surely as you have earned her enmity. Her master will get the information money, and she will keep a small percentage for her own peculium. She will probably link you up in some way with the Christians; or she may prefer to say she heard you criticizing Caesar. Very likely she will make both accusations. So let Ajax kill her. Call him in and give him orders."

"She may live, for all I care, until the Greek Kalends," Cleander answered. "Let Rome rot, and Caesar with it! I would rather die than have to live by such means. No, no, friend of mine; if my affairs have made you timid I will leave your house and so absolve you from all risk on my account. You may say you turned me out because you doubted my—"

"Jupiter capitolinus! Silence, will you! I will not permit my friendship to be spurned in that way! If you insist on dying like a fool, then I will die with you, that is all. Let us open our veins and have done with it—as Horatius Scipio did quite recently, and Claudius Tormentor, and at least a dozen others. Why give that beast Caligula the pleasure of killing us?"

"Let us give him the chance to play

the man before we play the weakling," Cleander answered. "No, no. Let us attend his banquet. Life is not worth much, but it is ours and it involves our dignity. Let us preserve it by all honorable means before we let a cur like Vulpes and a *meretrix* like Chloe frighten us to an ignoble end. I would as soon be crucified. Let Ajax take that strumpet home and tell her owner she was not worth table-leavings."

CHAPTER VII

"She is a Christian."

DAYLIGHT renewed optimism. On a sunny morning, listening to the caged birds sing beside the flower-decked fountain in Arbiter's atrium, it appeared ridiculous that destiny, Caligula or any other monstrous force should have horrors in store. Fleecy white clouds idled in a clear blue sky and the breakfast fruit tasted Olympian. After all, this was Rome, and they Patricians. It was nonsense to suppose that Caligula, a mere youth of no particular talent and no especial breeding, could destroy the traditional rights of men whose ancestors had conquered nearly all the known world. Men who are born with a sense of dignity revert to that as instinctively as other men, who have none, hate it and react against it.

The invitations to the banquet arrived early and threw the entire household into half hysterical excitement. Slaves are the establishers of routine. Slaves are the creators of social distances; they are the drawers of the veils of mystery that hide mere human vanities from human eyes and make impossible absurdities not only possible but unavoidable. It was Arbiter's and Cleander's slaves, from the Alexandrian steward downward, who made an invitation to a meal in Caesar's

palace seem like a summons to some unearthly sphere. And unearthly it was, since Caesar's slaves insisted that it should be.

Litters borne on solemn shoulders through the torch-lit streets toward a Capitol that uprose like the ghost of history against a star-lit sky. A dark gate made mysterious by lantern light. A quiet challenge, and the clank of armor from the darkness where the picked praetorian guard stood motionless. A lantern borne by an orderly. A veteran officer who peered into the lantern light to scrutinize the written invitations.

"Eja!—age! You may pass in."

Darkness again for a moment where an archway cast its shadow on square flagstones. Then, suddenly, no longer Rome—the orient. Not even Roman statuary—Greek and Egyptian gods—a marble stairway plundered from Cleopatra's waterfront. Not even Roman insolence as blunt and wholesome as an onion, but a new sort, sly-eyed and obsequious, arrayed in scented silk that came from who-knew-where by way of Trebizond. Politeness vaguely veiling greedy and suspicious smiles and not a trace—none—none whatever of the great Augustian simplicity. The grimness of Tiberius was gone. The gilt-and-marble stairway and the columned corridor beyond it leading to the great reception room, were lined with more attendants than a company of kings should need and not one face was frankly hostile or indifferently friendly, as a stranger's should be; they were curious, alert, sly, opportunist.

CLEANDER and Arbiter, striding down the corridor with the masculine grace of old-time Romans, were led by a silk-robed effeminate freedman who stank of exotic perfume. He led on past the

door of the great reception room toward a curtained antechamber. Slaves drew back the curtains as if they were revealing unchaste mysteries. The freedman led toward a desk of rare, carved wood where a freedman secretary wrote on parchment by the light of an oil lamp set inside a gilded human skull. He demanded the invitations.

"Are you Fabius Arbiter? Are you Vergilius Cleander? Very well."

He nodded, checked off the names on a tablet and resumed his writing. Two slaves at the far end of the anteroom drew crimson curtains clashing on a bronze rod; a double door opened suddenly, and they strode through into the small reception room where Greek erotic legends were depicted on the walls and Flaminius Glaucus, the palace chamberlain, a trifle pompous and a bit too genial, was doing the preliminary honors for about two dozen guests, of whom six were women. He greeted Arbiter without fuss, but he was so immediately cordial to Cleander that everyone else in the room turned and stared at him. He demanded that:

"Look, all of you! The handsomest young Roman who has come to court since I was chamberlain! Vergilius Cleander. Husbands, guard your wives!"

He may have thought Cleander's obvious embarrassment was due to bashfulness under the gaze of six beautiful women. He laughed with evident, but otherwise not easily explained amusement as he took Cleander's arm. He seemed almost excited—turned so suddenly that he bumped into the slave who was carrying a tray of glasses, followed by another who bore the sharp tanged appetizer wine; in spite of the slave's adroitness half a dozen glasses fell and were smashed to splinters on the floor, where they were pounced on by a third

slave and swept out of sight in an instant.

"Bacchus! I trust that is not an evil omen—are you readily disturbed by omens?—Whip that clumsy duffer—take him out and whip him as he deserves—give him two hundred strokes of the cane. The rogue is fortunate; if Caesar had seen him make that blunder—Did I tell you that we have with us tonight a neighbor of yours—do you know him?"

But Cleander had seen Vulpes almost before the doors had closed behind him and Arbiter. The sight had chilled his skin. It almost sickened him. He guessed that Glaucus' cordiality was due to a desire to cover up intrigue—his chuckle an indication of malicious zest for arranging stupefying shocks. However, Vulpes seemed equally taken aback. Cleander walked straight up to him.

"How are you, Vulpes? Did you pay that money to my steward?"

"I am well, Cleander, thank you. Yes, I paid him—though I thought it rank discourtesy in you to absent yourself and leave only a servant to greet me."

"Did you go to my house alone?"

"I never move unattended. In spite of Caesar's constant vigilance in our behalf, the roads are unsafe."

"Of course you had your gladiators with you. Whom else?"

"My attendants."

"Your's or Caesar's? Fox! I know you. I stole a move on you. Do now what you dare, and you shall find me ready for you."

HE WAS not ready. He had no notion how to protect himself, except, perhaps, by making a good impression on Caligula. But he hoped to stir in Vulpes a suspicion that a well timed counter-move was under way; it might cause Vulpes to delay his own plans. Anything to gain time.

"You talk," said Vulpes, "like a cockerel. However, I have eaten cockerels that crowed before their spurs were ready." He thrust out his great belly and his lower lip, rubbing his chin with the palm of his right hand and looking slyly sideways at Cleander, who resisted the impulse to tell him he looked like a seller of horse-meat. He made, instead, a shrewd, sneering foray for information:

"I had your pet *meretrix*, Chloe, with me last night."

"Yes," said Vulpes. "Yes, yes. But not *all* last night, Cleander. Chloe was dismissed by you at—what hour was it? She is a girl who knows the difference between an onion and a bunch of grapes, as you may have noticed."

Cleander turned his back and looked for Arbiter, who was conversing, with what seemed like genuine gaiety, with two women. He wanted to break to Arbiter the grim news that already Chloe had done mischief. But he had no chance to get near him. Opulently dressed slaves took their places at the top of three steps at the far end of the room, and Glaucus began reading the order of precedence from his tablet, rather roughly ordering the guests to line up as he called their names. Cleander's place was last; he would be at the foot of the table. Arbiter would be near the middle of the table, facing Vulpes.

The tall doors opened wide, revealing Caesar's banquet hall. In spite of his patrician tastes, Cleander had always thought himself a rather modern minded man, but his emotions instantly rebelled at the sight of that extravagance of oriental luxury. There was nothing Roman about it, no simplicity and no concession to the stern idealism of the days gone by. There was no harmony, no beauty. It was a lurid splurge of grossness, scowled on by a marble statue of

Publius Scipio Africanus at the far end of the hall. The other statues were of naked women. Almost naked slave girls, with their arms outstretched, upheld a sort of pergola of woven flowers, under whose overpoweringly scented arches the guests must pass to reach the table. Slave musicians in a balcony discoursed some sort of oriental music with a maddeningly suggestive lilt. Beneath the balcony, up-ended, three Egyptian mummy-cases stood like curiously observant sentinels, one between, and one on either side of two doors through which entertainers presently would come, and facing those, at a gilded door at the back of a high dais, stood two lictors and four plumed guardsmen, in armor, with spears and shields.

The scene so jarred Cleander's nerves that he forgot his own fear for the moment. He felt as if Rome's neck were under an alien heel. He felt it even more as he stood at the end corner of the long dinner table, beside his couch, with the scented breath of Caesar's boughten women in his ears, and waited in humble, indecorous silence for the tyrant.

SUDDENLY a golden trumpet sounded. The gilded door opened and Caesar strode on to the dais. He was not alone; he had a leopard with him and was followed by two black slaves, of whom one kept an eye on the leopard and held a noose in his gloved hand, with which to subdue the animal in case of need.

Of the two, the leopard looked by far the nobler, although Caligula wore an emperor's cloak over his silken garments and carried in his right hand a caduceus to suggest that he was something more than mortal. He was a scrawny, tall young man, with so much hair on his body that he could not by any means conceal it; but he was clean-shaven and, despite his youth, his head was almost bald. He

had pale eyelashes that made his green-gray eyes, red-rimmed from lechery and lack of sleep, look like those of a fish. He glanced down at the leopard and grinned. He seemed to try to imitate the leopard's sneer as he swung the caduceus to and fro in a probably half-unconscious simulation of the movements of the leopard's tail. The guests bowed, silent. Cleander was the only one whose eyes met Caligula's, and they stared at each other for nearly a minute, until at last Caligula stepped down to his own wide divan, draped in silks and leopard skins, at the head of the table. Prodding the couch with the caduceus, as if he thought there might be snakes concealed, he presently sat down and sprawled with the insolence of a barrack room bully, clucking and snapping his fingers to persuade the leopard to leap up and lie beside him.

"If my leopard were more obedient I would make him a senator," he remarked. That was all. No greeting to his guests. That was their permission to take their places, and they all did.

Suddenly the music struck up wildly and the flower girls leaped into movement, dancing with their ropes of flowers around and around the table. They were marvelously trained, but Caligula took no notice of them. Under slightly lowered eyelids he observed his guests, staring them one at a time out of countenance, but paying most attention to the women, craning his long neck to see them better, until at last his judgment fell on the youngest matron in the room.

"Is that your wife, Gratillus? I never suspected you of such good taste." His not unpleasant voice was vibrant and it carried through the music and the thump of bare feet dancing on the carpets. "Send her here to me. Let me see if she looks as lovely at close quarters."

The husband smiled. The wife obeyed.

She went and stood before him, and he signed to her to sit beside him on the divan. But she feared the leopard. Caligula laughed. For a minute he went through the farce of trying to persuade her; then he suddenly grew tired of it, prodded her with the caduceus and sent her, looking foolish and humiliated, to her husband.

"Good enough for you, Gratillus; but I like them twice as bold as leopards. Then I have some fun. And by my Genius, I tell you, there is not enough fun. There are too few Romans who have throats worth slitting."

Having made that offering to the evening's entertainment, he grew genial and began to talk to the guest at his right hand, joking with him about the dozens of new horses he had bought in the hope of entering at least one winning team in the chariot races. Conversation became general. Aurelius, a senator, whose place was at Cleander's left hand, talked with him sotto voce:

"Our Caligula is virginal tonight. He usually gives a pretty woman's husband more than that to remember him by. I have seen him—"

"Gaiety! More gaiety!" Caligula shouted. He was already drinking like a dry sponge. "Drive out these fools!" One gesture and the dancing girls all fled like frightened children through a door between the mummy-cases. A long line of slaves came through another door carrying mounds of food. "Bring on your entertainers! Jupiter! I have had no sleep for three nights. Does nobody care? Am I to sit here mocked by melancholy?"

"As for me," said Aurelius, "I am one of those who refuse to marry, lest Caligula should hear of it. He might bid my wife to a banquet. But did you hear about Marcus Longinius? Thinking to ingratiate

ate himself with Caesar he married a woman and sent out tempting rumors. Sure enough, Caligula invited them. But he is shrewd; he can see through subtler schemes than that. He gave the woman one glance and then banished them both to an island to endure each other's company. He said he could imagine no worse fate for anyone, nor anyone more worthy of a worse if only that could be invented."

CONJURERS came in, and tumblers, to whom impossibilities seemed commonplace. Caligula looked bored. He began to fool with the leopard beside him until the slave whose business it was to guard him from the animal crouched nearer to the throne on tiptoe, with his noose in both hands, ready. Then a slave behind the dais whispered, and Caligula remembered something.

"Is that not Virgilius Cleander at the far end?" he demanded. "By the Dioscuri, you are too good looking! It is small wonder that women love you. I am told you have a slave whose beauty has even made you write bad poems! Let us see this Venus. Where is she?"

"I don't know," said Cleander.

"Don't you? I do. Bring the woman in!"

Cleander almost groaned aloud. Aurelius, beside him, chuckled in a sort of helpless sympathy, half cynical, half fearful to betray itself. Arbiter, on the far side of the table, met Cleander's eyes; he had turned ashen gray.

"She is a Christian," said Vulpes, smirking.

"Is she?" asked Caligula. "I am told that Christians don't believe in Roman gods, in which they are not far from being wise. If they should say there is no god but Caesar I would pack the senate with them and we might see decent

government for once. However, bring the woman in!"

CHAPTER VIII

"I accuse myself"

MARCIA came in between two guardsmen. Someone had dressed her in yellow linen, with a chaplet of rose-buds and a chain of flowers around her shoulders. That was Glaucus' doing; he looked proud of his showmanship; he eyed Cleander sideways, not yet openly, but obviously gloating at the chagrin of a man whom he had been at such pains to flatter. Vulpes lolled and looked self-consciously important — virtuous — triumphant. To Cleander now the whole plot was as plain as if written in words on the wall: Chloe had traced Marcia and connected her with the outlaw Christians—Marcia was to be the bait for Caesar's gluttony—he, Cleander, was to be humiliated in exchange for the humiliation he had tendered Vulpes in the house of Flaccus—he was then to be accused of treason.

Marcia met his eyes. She loved him. For the first time in his life he knew what love was. She was loyal to the death; he understood that—thrilled so to the understanding of it that he hardly heard Aurelius' low voice:

"Have you poison with you? If so, swallow it. Caligula hates a handsome man. It is too bad, but the dice seem loaded."

Cleander glanced at Arbiter, whose pallor betrayed the fear that gripped him. He decided to save Arbiter at all costs. He could see no hope of saving Marcia from the clutches of Caesar, who already was leering at her, licking his lips, oblivious for the moment of everything except her. He enjoyed unwilling

women. Modesty enflamed his madness.

Suddenly a sort of madness seized Cleander. Dignity seemed better to him than any prize that life could offer. Marcia had dignity. Had he none? His was a Roman's heritage. Such swine as Vulpes—such a bestial tyrant as Caligula might rob him of money and lands. Could they rob him of valor. He, too, could spring surprises. He arose from his couch. His voice was as abrupt and vibrant with authority as some scarred tribune's on parade.

"Caesar, that woman is free. I freed her yesterday. She is no man's property. As her patron, I appeal on her behalf to Roman law."

He sat down, cool, in spite of the sensation he had caused. He smiled at Caesar's answering oath; it was a fight now, and the fight was on; he had never yet flinched in action. He stood up again; that oath had ripped aside Caligula's mask; the coward showed within the monster:

"The law is your own. You have used it scores of times. I defy you to dare to ignore it now."

The guards clanged shields on armor to remind Caligula that they were there to do his bidding. Caligula scowled like a maniac. There was silence for at least a dozen deep-drawn breaths. Even the music ceased. Then Vulpes croaked his contribution to the climax:

"Is the law not, that a slave may not be freed to save her from being tortured to give evidence against her master?"

Again Cleander stood up. "Evidence on what charge?" he demanded. "I am a Roman. It is my right to know who my accusers are."

"I have heard it said," said Vulpes, sticking out his lower lip, "Virgilius Cleander is accused of having said that Caesar is a traitor to Rome because he ignores

our Roman laws and destroys our Roman institutions. If to speak such words is treason, then the Roman law is that the man's slaves all may be examined under torture. If convicted, the man's possessions are forfeit—and the man's life also."

ARBITER was whispering to Glaucus, who nodded repeatedly. Glaucus somehow seemed aware of humor in the situation—sardonic humor; but then, Glaucus understood Caligula. Cleander, knowing he had called down death on his own head, faced it mockingly—a mood that made him swift to snatch at chances; there was one chance in a million that Arbiter had thought of something, so Cleander sparred to give him time:

"Are you my accuser, Vulpes?" he demanded.

Glaucus gave him no time to deny it; craning his neck to miss nothing of what Arbiter was saying, he tossed his scrap of fuel in the flame:

"Yes, Vulpes is your accuser."

"I am more amused," announced Caligula, "than I have been for weeks. Vulpes is a fine fat pigeon."

"He is very rich," said Glaucus. Even Marcia smiled at that remark; it meant that Arbiter would make no claim for a percentage of the fat man's plunder. Arbiter had given information—true or false, no matter—deadly.

"Is the law not, that a false informer stands convicted of the crime he charged?" Cleander asked. "I charge you, Vulpes, on two counts. Deny one, and you prove the other. How long since you accused me?"

Vulpes made no answer; he was watching Caesar's face; and Caesar's face was uglier than the leopard's on the throne beside him. Glaucus began studying his tablet.

"It was Vulpes," he remarked, "who wrote suggesting that Cleander's Marcia might make a welcome gift for Caesar."

"Pluto!" exclaimed Caligula. "You knew she was a Christian and you recommended her for me? Did you wish to see me murdered? Poisoned? Done to death by magic?"

Vulpes stammered: "Imperator, I have thought of nothing but your welfare."

"Toad!" Cleander interrupted. "You accused me. Nevertheless, you sat at table with me in Flaccus' house; and yesterday you paid to my steward five hundred thousand sesterces. I denounce you as a liar or else as one who knowingly consorts with traitors!"

"I denounce you as a Christian," said Vulpes.

"Excellent. They both stand charged with treason. We will torture them all," said Caligula. "Slaves first, masters afterwards, Cleander being such a stickler for our cherished forms of law."

"Then you, too, appeal to the law?" Cleander asked him.

Caligula glanced at Glaucus: "How long is it since I put two senators to death for daring to advise me to abolish law?"

"They are probably more or less dead by now," said Glaucus.

"Oh, yes, I remember, we invented a new way of killing them. We will begin by torturing Cleander's lady-love, whom he has manumitted too late. Are his other slaves in custody? Where are they? By my Genius, if one escapes me I will punish someone! Where are Vulpes' servants? Round up all of them."

Four guards strode forward, eyebrows raised, eyes watchful for the first hint.

"Yes, yes, put them both in fetters. Traitors at Caesar's banquet table—this is the most interesting moment since—"

Cleander interrupted him, although he

no longer troubled himself to look at Vulpes or at Caesar. His eyes met Marcia's; he knew no torture in the world could make her say one word against him, and he knew the thought of death was hugely sweeter to her than the prospect of an hour in Caesar's clutches—one of her strange, chaste, Christian principles that had no taint of pride—incomprehensible, but rather beautifully blameless; her astonishing ideals were what he loved best. She would welcome death, if she might meet it unpolluted by Caligula, and he, Cleander, had it in his mind to give her that gift. In addition, it was not within his estimate of dignity to let slaves suffer for their master's ill luck. With a characteristic Roman gesture of the right arm he appealed to his fellow guests, inviting their opinion and daring Caesar to defy it:

"May the slaves of a man whose guilt is self-confessed before more than a dozen witnesses be put to torture?" he demanded.

THERE was a murmur. One answer was possible, and only one.

"May a freedwoman be tortured if she has confessed her guilt? Marcia, are you a Christian?"

"All know I am," said Marcia. "I have not denied it. I will be a Christian with my last breath."

"You have heard her," said Cleander. "I, too, am a Christian. I accuse myself." His gestures were as eloquent as only Roman charm could make them, as he turned toward Caligula. "That all may know me guilty, I accuse you, Caesar, of usurping powers not entrusted to you by the people. Let the law pursue its course. I have a Roman's right to die in the arena—as has Marcia also. Vulpes, who pretends he is a guiltless paragon of virtue, you may torture as you see fit."

That was the one sure thrust Cleander

made. Caligula's insomnia-maddened brain was fertile with expedients for making law submit to his caprices; he had fifty laws he could have cited, passed by a servile senate and forgotten until Caesar chose to use them. It would add to his enjoyment to torture them, master and slave, in each other's presence, if that might lawfully be done. But Vulpes saved that moment for them all, intending nothing of the kind.

He rose and flung himself at Caesar's feet. He groveled. He offered money. Utterly losing his head, he vowed he would reveal the names of plotters against Caesar's life. He would surrender his estates and all his wealth to Caesar—

"They are mine already," Caesar answered, stroking his leopard and licking his lips.

"But not the lions, Caesar—not the lions!"

There was possibly remaining in Caligula some remnant of appreciation for a manly attitude, some measure of contempt for cowardice. More probably a sense of drama lingered in his mad mind. Contrast stirred in him sardonic humor. And he may have thought of the political advantage to himself, of glutting the eyes of the Roman mob with the sight of a beautiful woman and two men of rank done shamefully to death in the arena.

"To the lions with them—all three! Drag that fool out! Secretary—where is that slow drudge? Write the order—make haste—all three to the carceres—for treason—to be torn by lions in the next games."

CHAPTER IX

"Which way do you like death?"

GAIUS RUBER, the lanista, was a man whose charity was tempered by the obvious responsibilities of his pro-

fession, and by his own cupidity, which was no less obvious. His wintry-blue eyes were too close-set to be those of a generous man; and, commonly with executioners and jailers of all times, it was not a soft heart that had earned him his peculiar distinction. He had seen too many die to care a clipped *as* for the rank, sex, guilt or innocence of victims.



"How do you propose to pay me?"

But his pay was nothing much and, under Caligula, he did not always get it; so, within extremely rigid limits set by knowledge that the last lanista had been beaten to death by Caligula's order for permitting prisoners to escape, he was not above persuasion if it took the form of something he could use for money.

Down in the reeking darkness of the dungeons underneath the Circus, Maximus Cleander spoke with him through the small iron grating of a cell door. There was a fire, in a brazier, at the end of the stone passage, but that was not for

anybody's comfort; it was to heat the irons with which to keep the prisoners in order in the event they made unnecessary noises or indulged despair with attempts at mutiny. Its red light glowed on Gaius Ruber's face and made one half of it look like a sardonius cameo.

"A well born gentleman might lie to me," said Ruber. "I have known them to do it."

"Yes, and I could hold my tongue," Cleander answered. "I am telling you the truth, and what I ask will cost you nothing; so that even if you should get nothing you would not be out of pocket. You will be running no risk—none whatever."

"How do you propose to pay me?"

"You may pay yourself. Like most men with their life and liberty at stake in these uncertain times, I buried a considerable sum of money. I can tell you where I buried it."

"Go on then, tell me."

"I will tell you at the moment when I enter the arena—not until then—and then only if you have done what I ask you to do."

"You want poison, I suppose," said Ruber, "or an opiate. Well, you can't have either. I send in my prisoners to amuse the people, not to die drunk."

"Pluto take you and your opiates! For myself I want very little—nothing but my own clean clothing."

"It is usual to sell good clothing to a dealer."

"You may sell mine after I am dead."

"All torn and bloody? Bacchus! Do you take me for a born fool?"

"All right then. My money can stay where I buried it."

"Don't get testy. What else do you want?"

"I want Marcia to enter the arena with me—"

"She will do that anyhow. Vulpes, she, you and a dozen others; but the others are all prisoners from Sicily—according to the execution warrant, bandits."

"I want Marcia unviolated, unharmed and decently dressed."

"Hey! Hey! Are you crazy? That's a good looking girl, that Marcia. I can sell her favors for a fine price to the merry lads who like to brag about that sort of pastime from their seats in the stadium. They pay well, since it gives them a peculiar emotion to see a woman they have violated torn by lions."

"My buried hoard would pay you ten times better. Much more than ten times better."

"If I thought it weren't a mare's nest at a rainbow's end."

"It is all gold money of Augustus' minting. And its secret shall die with me unless you do exactly as I ask. But if you do exactly as I ask, then I will tell you, just before we enter the arena, where the money is and how to get it."

"Bacchus! Almost I believe you. Well, as you say, it will cost me nothing. I will chance it—maybe. I will think it over. Pluto! Tell me an unlikely story when the time comes, and I will give you a touch of the hot iron as you enter the arena that will make you crave the lions as a quick way out of anguish! Hey-yeh, I have heard so many stories. On the warrant you are called a Christian. Do you swear by the God of the Christians?"

"No. By my father's hearth and by my *manes*."

"Well, that sounds convincing. And you look honest. Maybe I will risk it—maybe."

ARBITER, by some strange freak of destiny, had not been charged with harboring a traitor. Possibly the total

of his debts was known to exceed his assets, so that his estate was not worth confiscating. And Cleander knew that Arbiter would leave no ingenuity untried to effect a rescue, even though the odds against it were a million to one. All other friendship failing, Arbiter would very likely smuggle in some poison. But Cleander, if so, was determined not to use it, since he knew that Marcia would refuse to use it, that being one of her incomprehensible rules of conduct; and the poet in him made it almost seem a privilege to die with Marcia, since both of them must die in any case. He could comfort her and lend her courage; that was something. Thirty thousand mocking voices—thirty thousand staring faces—that would be the worst of the ordeal. Hungry lions do their business fairly quickly.

He could hear the lions. He could smell them. There was an air-shaft leading from the dens up through the dungeons. When the trainers went in to enrage the hungry brutes by offering them meat and then withdrawing it, only to crack them instead on the nose with a stick, he wondered about lions. There was not much else to think about. He wondered how the hunters faced them in their native deserts—how much fight one man could offer twenty of them, if he had a weapon—and what sort of weapon? There was no more skillful swordsman than himself in all Rome—

That brought Arbiter to mind again. He wondered whether Arbiter would realize that next to an actual rescue, which was so nearly impossible as not to be worth considering, the greatest service he would do would be to smuggle in some sort of weapon, if only a dagger. He dared not try to send him word to that effect. He could only hope that Arbiter would think of it. To go down

fighting would make death easier even though the fight were hopeless. He began to wonder how much truth there was in stories he had heard of sending thought through stone walls. How was the trick done? He began to try to do it—frowning—concentrating.

"Arbiter! Arbiter! Send me a weapon!"

But the days and nights dragged on without a sign from Arbiter, until the morning came when thunder on the wooden platforms of the stadium announced that the people were taking their seats. The unfed, irritated lions roared in darkness. Leopards yowled. There was a din of voices like the far-off frenzy of the sea, ascending to a burst of greeting as the people recognized some favorite official. It was almost possible to tell when Caesar took his place. And there was no doubt when the master of ceremonies gave the signal to begin. There was a sudden silence, lasting all the while the gladiators marched past Caesar's box and halted to salute him:

"Caesar! nos morituri te salutamus!"

Then the short, sharp bursts of mob excitement, as the gladiators fought in pairs, and the exultant shout of "*Habet!*" when a man lay bleeding on the sunlit sand.

At last the summons. Hastily Cleander donned the clean and neatly folded clothing that Gaius Ruber sent to him by the hand of a dungeon guard. So Gaius Ruber kept faith? He had even sent the beautifully woven toga that Cleander wore the night of his arrest. Cleander smiled; he wondered what Caligula and all his intimates would say to a man being sent to execution in a toga! But had Ruber kept the bargain about Marcia? If so, he should have the secret of the buried hoard—not otherwise. Up then, out of stenching darkness to the fresher air and

dim light of the arched enclosure beneath Caesar's royal box; he stumbled over corpses of seven gladiators in a row that had been dragged out by the masked slaves—two with throats cut—three marked by the hot iron to determine whether they were actually dead or only shamming.

THERE was din in the arena; thirty Spanish bulls were being done to death by men on horseback, and were giving a gory account of themselves according to the comments of a guard who peered through a knot hole in the high, wide entrance door.

"Hercules! Seven—no, eight horses slain—and six men!"

Vulpes stepped forth from a group of prisoners—a pale, emaciated Vulpes in the unbleached smock served out to such criminals as had clothes worth taking from them. There was no sign yet of Marcia. A slave-guard with a hot iron brandished it at Vulpes, driving him back to the group he had left; but other slaves with hot irons drove the entire group toward the dingy corner where Cleander stood; he found himself face to face with Vulpes, hemmed in by the other hopeless wretches, hungry, verminous and clothed like Vulpes in the smocks that were to be their shrouds.

"Cleander, I have poison. I will share it with you."

"Swallow it yourself, you blackguard. Offer some to those poor devils."

"No, no, I have barely enough for two of us."

"Then swallow it all. And may the Harpies hound your shade forever!"

"Is that generous, Cleander?"

It was Marcia at last, edging her way between the prisoners, wearing the same light yellow costume they had decked her with for Caesar's banquet—pale from the

dungeon darkness, but as gay as if bound to her wedding.

"How have they treated you, Marcia?"

"Almost kindly. It is very sweet to die with you, Cleander."

"No humiliation?"

"No, none. Gaius Ruber—"

Gaius Ruber, looking worried—as a man must be on whom, in part, depends the entertainment of a candid audience—came near them, from behind Cleander, standing half invisible within the shadow of the wall. He had left a narrow, wooden door in the wall half open, for a swift retreat in case some notable should chance to pass through, as they sometimes did for the sake of sneering at an enemy condemned to die.

"What of it?" he demanded. "Do you keep that promise?"

Cleander nodded. "At the north end of my farm, eleven paces from the great oak, stands a granite landmark. Stand exactly midway of the line between them. Take eleven paces southward. Dig—and you have it."

"May your shade know never a resting place if you have lied to me," said Gaius Ruber. Then he vanished and the door shut squeaking on a hinge innocent of oil. Cleander then took Marcia in his arms, but he embraced her almost sternly; he was afraid to let emotion master him, lest dignity should suffer. He wanted to keep calm for Marcia's sake. No word—no sign from Arbiter. That stung him; he supposed that even Arbiter was faithless, like the others. Just one word by the mouth of a slave from Arbiter, and he could have met death gaily; stoically.

"You are a brave girl, Marcia. I love you, and I die with you without regret."

He did not hear her answer; it was smothered in a half-sob on his shoulder. And besides, he had a glimpse just then of the arena and the tiers on tiers of

crowded seats, as the door swung wide to let them drag out mangled carcasses of bulls and horses—presently of men, too. He wondered whether Arbiter was up there among the spectators—hoped he was—then hoped he was not. Slaves went hurrying out with bags of sand to cover up the bloodstains, and the door swung shut. Another moment now. Marcia, with her face against his breast, was praying; he patted her and stroked her hair, but he was thinking about Arbiter.

"Farewell to friendship, friend of mine. Though you have failed me, may you not know—"

THE hinge of the door in the shadow behind him creaked again and premonition stirred him. He could not well move, because of Marcia, but he turned his head; the door was partly open, and he thought he saw someone's figure crouching in the deepest darkness. However, there was no time to look twice. A brazen trumpet blared in the arena and the voice of Gaius Ruber shouted: "Victims for the lions next! Step forward, all of you. The moment the door opens, out with you!" A masked slave rattled his iron against a brazier. "And remember: hot iron for whichever of you halts before you reach the middle of the arena!"

Something touched Cleander's left hand, and a voice said: "Take it—make haste—don't look!" He groped, gripped, heard the hinge squeak—and hugged Marcia—a new man! Then he let go of her, he needed both hands for a moment; somehow he must manage to conceal a long sword and a long stiletto in his toga; he found he could do it by letting the toga fall unevenly, the longer portion hanging from his left arm.

"O ye gods, if ye are gods, be good to Arbiter who did not fail his friend!" he prayed—the first time he had prayed un-

cynically since he had been old enough to reason. Then the door swung wide again, saluted by a mocking roar from thirty thousand throats. He threw his right arm around Marcia and led the way in boldly—careless—reckless—he could die now as a man should. He was eager to get well into the center before any of the guards should see that good long sword and take it from him—not that anyone would get it without a hot fight. Not until he reached the center, practising his eyes to get them used to the glare of the sand, his fellow victims trailing in a miserable group behind him, did he turn and stare at the Imperial suite, where he could see Caligula and Glaucus and a dozen others lolling on golden cushions beneath a purple awning.

IT was then that he took his first look at the fine Damascus blade and once more blessed his good friend Arbiter. The stiletto was no less perfect; it was such a dagger as had once slain Caesar beneath Pompey's statue on the Ides of March. He wrapped his toga thoughtfully around his left arm and explained to Marcia how to tuck the ends in, so that it would serve him as a sort of armor—and better, at that, than a shield that would have made his left hand useful only for defense. He laughed, remembering his own advice to Arbiter: "Speed! A swift blow is worth two slow ones—a quick thrust, followed thrice as swiftly by another—"

They on the high-banked seats had seen his sword. There was a murmur, and then tumult. Scornfully his brave eyes answered as he gazed around him to mark the openings through which the lions would come. Then Vulpes:

"Pity me and run me through with that, Cleander!" He was on his knees, baring his gray-haired breast.

"Swallow your poison, you vermin!"

"I did—I have—it was not poison—Gaius Ruber fooled me!"

"Go and complain to Caesar. There he sits. Salute him—offer to betray another dozen Romans."

Mad with terror, Vulpes leaped at that idea. Raising his smock to let his fat legs run the faster, he almost scampered toward Caesar's awninged seat. The first lion, blinking at the sunlight as he stole forth from an opening, gave chase and slew him before Vulpes knew that they had pulled the cords and loosed the lions for their meal. Applause—yells—cat-calls from the mob. Then silence.

Marcia's voice: "The lions are coming now, Cleander. I am sorry you were not baptised; but neither was the thief who died beside the Saviour on the cross, and he was promised he should be that night in paradise. Die fighting, if it makes death easier; but die remembering the Lord, who died that we might have eternal life."

He had no heart to undeceive her. Let her die believing him a Christian; it might make death easier for her, too.

"Marcia, keep close behind me. Do you hear me? Move swiftly whenever I turn, and keep behind me. Keep close, but keep away from my sword arm."

"Brave Cleander, I fear not death."

He knew that—knew that unless he could think of good reasons she would not try to prolong life. And there was no real reason. He imagined one:

"You know how to bless me as I die. I don't. So you must die last, Marcia."

He felt the pressure of her hand but did not hear her answer. He did not even see the spectators; they had merged into a splurge of sunlit color. He was not really aware of the other victims, except vaguely. He had concentrated all his faculties. There was a male lion sniffing at the blood beneath the freshly strewn sand;

several more, crouching, stalked from one direction; three were on his right hand, heads high, staring at their prey and wondering, apparently, where to begin. One famished looking female, on his left hand, crouching by herself, suddenly made up her mind and came on swiftly, belly to the sand. Cleander made his mind up also; for a swordsman, determined attack is the essence, the heart of defense.

He met that lioness midway of her spring, side-stepping, stabbing her three times before she could correct her impetus. There came a sea roar from the tiers of seats, but it did not drown Marcia's quiet voice behind him:

"On your right, Cleander!"

Three together now—three male lions, ravening with hunger. He attacked the foremost; it rose and struck him on the forearm, but the folded toga deadened the terrific shock. The sword went home like lightening. One lion jumped the stricken one to come at him in flank. Cleander jumped, too—forward. The third lion sprang at Marcia; he slew it as it passed him, with a blow of the edge of his sword that severed the neck vertebrae—turned swiftly as Marcia screamed to him and drove his point home down the throat of the second lion, then closing—stabbing with the long stiletto, all but disarmed by the death throes of the beast. He had to set his left foot on the lion's head to drag the sword free. Time then—three breaths—for a glance around him.

THERE was havoc among the other victims. Most of them were down, being rent, but four still stood, half dead with horror, awaiting death like dumb sheep in a shambles. Cleander slew one lion from behind as it tore at a victim's entrails. Marcia screamed again and he turned in time to attack an old lion that had left his meal to deal with danger

first; he charged in, crouching low, but the sword point pierced his right eye and as he rolled in agony the next stab pierced his lungs.

Speed—speed! "Keep close, Marcia!" The wild thought flashed into Cleander's mind that if he should slay all those lions then the crowd might acclaim him pardoned and perhaps Caligula would yield to the crowd's demand. He might save Marcia, himself and those four wretches who remained. But even as he sprang to defend those four they were dragged down all in a heap and five lions fought with one another for the spoil. Of the five lions he slew three; two more fled from him, and then he paused again. The crowd was frantic with excitement, but there was no more thrill to offer them; the remaining lions had dragged their victims in all directions, to be away from one another, and the tumult lessened. He held up his sword to appeal to the crowd, but there was no such response as would force Caligula to let him go free. He glanced toward the Vestal Virgins in their box near Caesar's suite, but there was no sign from the Vestals either.

"Marcia, if the crowd grow weary of us—"

Even as he spoke the pike-armed keepers of the lions came in through half a dozen doors and drove the lions snarling to their dens, where live goats bleated. Suddenly a new excitement stirred the crowd. One voice like a cry in a wilderness yelled "Murmex!" In a moment the whole stadium was yelling "Murmex! Murmex!" And then sudden silence as the great door at the far end opened and a gladiator strode in, armed with helmet, shield and sword.

He was a giant. He was the hated favorite of Rome. Three years invincible—swaggering—insolent—loathed for his vanity—loved for his fighting genius—

contemptuous of the crowd that praised him, of the women who flung their flowers to him, and of all opponents, he strode in, faced the imperial awning and saluted Caesar. Someone tossed a jeweled bracelet to him, and he stooped and clasped it on his left wrist, leering, gesturing with his thumb at Marcia. Then he turned to face Cleander. But Cleander offered



"He raised his right arm toward the Vestal Virgins."

Caesar no salute. Holding sword and dagger in his left hand for a moment, he raised his right arm toward the Vestal Virgins, marveling at their pale, impassive faces. They made no response.

Murmex gestured to Cleander with an insolent jerk of the head to go back to the center of the arena and be slain there; but Cleander saw fit not to humor him.

"I earn the wench for my reward," said Murmex. "Which way do you like death—edge or point?"

"Wait and see," said Cleander, and

Murmex waited just one second too long. He was forced on the defensive before he could turn with his back to the sun, and he found that buckler small use against the swift stiletto. Blood came streaming from his ribs before his weight was off his heels. His heavy bronze sword found no room to swing; he needed every ounce of strength he had to spring back and recover balance, and Cleander kept on leading—lunging at him, using lightning speed against the big man's weight and huge strength; forcing him to give ground—backward—backward—until the mob's excitement sounded like a storm at sea, and Murmex, trying the ancient ruse of suddenly retreating to gain footroom for a whirlwind charge, slipped sideways on the blood from Vulpes' lion-rent corpse and fell dead, with Cleander's sword-point thrust into his heart. "Habet! Murmex habet! Habet!"

THE stadium went mad. Cleander threw his left arm around Marcia. He thrust his thrumming sword-point in the sand and, turning, raised his right arm toward the Vestal Virgins.

"Thumbs up! Thumbs up!" Thirty thousand throats were one in thunderous applause as the Vestals, all together, made the sign that neither Caesar, mob nor senate would have dared to challenge. Caesar waved a purple handkerchief. The great, grim gate beneath the imperial box, through which so many victims went, so few returned, swung wide and someone in the dimness beckoned:

"Haste! Haste! You are delaying business!"

Masked slaves hurried in with hooks and bags of sand, to drag the carcasses away and cover the bloodstains. Murmex' body, drawn by hooks beneath the arm-pits, passed through ahead of Marcia and Cleander, so swift was the disciplined

service—even swifter than the changing moods of Rome's impatient mob.

And in the shadow of the gloom within, beside a charcoal brazier, stood Arbiter, his arms outreaching. He embraced Cleander. He was neither dry-eyed nor articulate. "Away—away from here," he urged. He took their arms and shoved them toward the exit, past the locked cells where gladiators waited for their cues—then found speech: "But where did you get your weapons?"

"You—did you not send me sword and dagger?" asked Cleander.

"I? No—"

"It was God," said Marcia.

"—I did work all avenues to reach the Vestals. I got word to them at last through Flavius Augustus Nepos, father of the youngest Vestal, who has recently donated a million sesterces to the temple funds."

They passed two shadowy forms within the gloom of the passage entrance. Gaius Ruber held a small man by the throat and shook him:

"Answer me! By Bacchus, I will make you answer. Did you give that sword to him? I swear to Pluto I will have you crucified!"

"What does it matter who gave him the sword?" asked Simon's voice. "Has Caesar not been satisfied, and does he not go free? Let go of me."

"Jupiter! Why did you do it? You dog of an impudent Jew! You—"

"How else should I buy lion skins, if nobody kills lions? And what have you lost? Don't I pay good prices?"

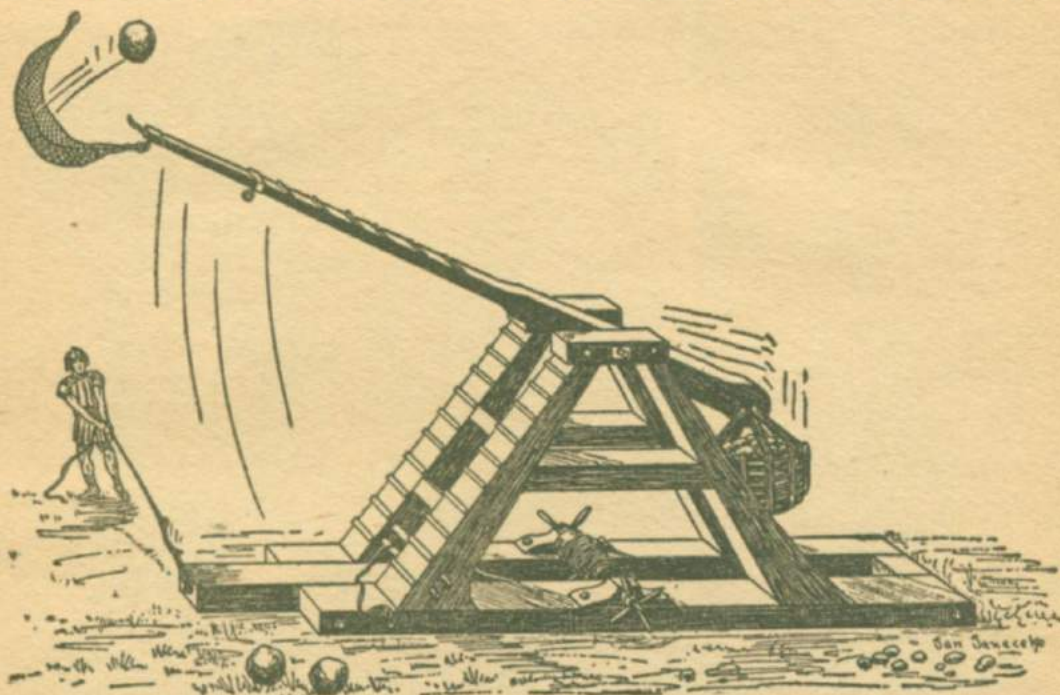
Quietly Cleander laid his hand on Gaius Ruber's shoulder. "Gently, Ruber. As he says, what has my life cost you? You shall have your pot of money without digging for it. Pass us out. Let Simon follow. Simon—"

"Has been a Christian for seven years," said Marcia, whispering in Cleander's ear.

TOOLS OF DEATH

By JAN JANECEK

A GREAT IMPROVEMENT OVER DAVID'S SLINGSHOT



A throwing machine for siege use—a pivoted arm with weight on one end and missile in a sling on the other. The "cannoneer" winds it up and then trips the beam. This weapon was used from the earliest Greek days till well past the days of Julius Caesar—who called it a "ballista."



THE ORIGINAL BLACKJACK

THE FLAIL—A very ancient and widely used weapon, being found from the 13th to the 18th centuries in India, China and Japan. Originally, it probably was an agricultural implement, but its effectiveness for military use was soon increased by adding spikes. Very short flails were sometimes used by horsemen.

The Coasts of

FIRST OF A SERIES



In talking with H. Bedford-Jones, that well-known reincarnation of Alexandre Dumas, Sr., about doing some work for GOLDEN FLEECE, he made the remark that "many a noble barque, in history, has gone to wreck on the coasts of chance." We caught at the phrase. "There," we exclaimed, "is the subject for a series! Little known historical dramas, great dreams, crafty plots, where some unforeseen pebble stubbed the toe of history!" Maybe our metaphors were mixed, but Mr. Bedford-Jones got the idea, as proved by this, his first story of the series to come—

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FIRST OF A SERIES



In talking with H. Bedford-Jones, that well-known reincarnation of Alexandre Dumas, Sr., about doing some work for GOLDEN FLEECE, he made the remark that "many a noble barque, in history, has gone to wreck on the coasts of chance." We caught at the phrase. "There," we exclaimed, "is the subject for a series! Little known historical dramas, great dreams, crafty plots, where some unforeseen pebble stubbed the toe of history!" Maybe our metaphors were mixed, but Mr. Bedford-Jones got the idea, as proved by this, his first story of the series to come—

Chance

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by
JAY JACKSON



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EVENING AT THE BLACK BULL

MY FRIEND HABERLEIN comes into my office and calmly settles down and raises hob with my business in a most annoying manner. I can't resist him; no one can resist him.

He has a hypnotic charm that amounts to genius. If he says: "Stop!" the clock on the desk ceases work—he's that kind.

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When he came in yesterday, I saw at a glance that he was all lit up; not with

liquor but with a new idea. He pulled up a chair, fastened his black and glittering eye upon me, and let me have both barrels.

"Harry, I've been looking into history. I'm making a collection of what's positively the most fascinating line of stories you ever heard! You know, a lot of queer things happened that don't get into the history books; odd, trifling matters that changed the course of human events, in a greater or lesser degree. Who knows that, if a man hadn't stopped to shave, Bonaparte would have gone to the guillotine? It's a fact."

"Tell it to the marines," I said crossly. "Here I've got a pile of work——"

"Well, listen!" he said, and with a groan of resignation I listened. "What I've got on my mind right now, is rich stuff. In the middle of the seventeenth century, when Cromwell ruled in England and Mazarin in France, a piddling little unknown robber baron over in Italy changed the whole course of the world's commerce and even history; and it all happened because a scoundrelly Frenchman couldn't keep his hands off a gal! Can you beat that!"

"I don't believe it," was my weak response. Haberlein leaned forward.

"I'll prove it to you. Leghorn, at that time, was one of the greatest free ports in the world, the greatest center of commerce in the Mediterranean; even the Moslem merchants could come there unmolested. The English, however, had settled Leghorn heavily and were in practical control of commerce there. Leghorn was in the territory of Tuscany, ruled by the Grand Duke, one of the last of the old Medici family. Got it?"

I nodded. He shoved aside my papers, spread himself on the desk, and pitched in.

"That's just the background. France

hated and feared England; the war for all the commerce of the east was on, but it remained underground. With that in mind, I want you to look at the Italian coast, at the highway north of Leghorn and Florence. I want to make you see the man who was whipping his horse along, riding hell for leather, in a late afternoon. He was only a short distance outside the town of Corthia, for which he was making——"

The magic of that voice persuaded me, moved me, haunted me. The yellow spurning dust of the road, the chestnut trees, the sharp Italian hills, uprose before me. And the man, who with whip and spur urged his lathered, wheezing horse along the curving road.

A little man, ferret-nosed, with very wide shoulders and very long arms, and in his sharp features a peculiar deadly expression. At an inbend of the road, the Tavern of the Black Bull suddenly appeared, and a sigh of relief escaped him.

It was a pleasant inn, to anyone who knew not its evil name, with high oak trees shading the courtyard from the hot Italian sun. A structure half of outward stone, half built into the steep hillside.

The staggering horse clattered to a halt in the courtyard, the rider slid down. No grooms came forth; no one was in sight save the innkeeper, a burly man who stood in the entrance and emitted a cheery but wary word of greeting.

"Welcome, Ser Nicolo! Whether pursuing or pursued, you've come to the right place! Are you followed?"

"No, blast you! Do I have to be a fugitive because I'm riding hard?" The little man, not so little now that he stood on his feet, stumbled stiffly across the stones. "A fresh horse, quickly! I must reach Duke Raymond of Corthia at once!"

"You'll do that without killing another horse." "The duke will be here at any moment; he's overdue now. He's riding out from town on business."

"The usual business, eh? Good!" Ser Nicolo clapped the other on the shoulder. "Inside! You're going to have business and plenty of it, in another hour or less."

In the vast, gloomy ordinary of that sinister inn, Ser Nicolo settled himself comfortably at a table, opposite the innkeeper.

"What news?" the latter demanded. Ser Nicolo gulped down his wine and grunted.

"For Raymond, not for you."

"Careful, Ser Nicolo!" said the burly man. "You may be the most famous spadassin in Italy, your stiletto the highest priced and surest but after all, you're a hired bravo. This is Duke Raymond's tavern, and I'm in his confidence."

Ser Nicolo grinned faintly. "True. News? Well, Cromwell rules in England, Mazarin rules France for the boy Louis, and Raymond rules in Corthia. A fine weapon, a fine gem, a fine woman—Raymond welcomes any of the three. I bring him jewels and a woman—the daughter of a Genoese merchant and her lover, a puling Frenchman. They'll be here in an hour. Enough said?"

"Enough, aye! Hello, here's Francesco now; his job must be finished."

SOMEWHERE in the cavernous recesses of the place, whose immense oak beams were black with age and smoke, a massive door creaked open. A low, shuddering sound echoed faintly; the groans of a man in mortal agony. A swaggering figure came forward to the table, a stout fellow whose bare forearms and leathern apron were

splashed with ominous crimson; he flung down a folded parchment.

"There it is, signed and sealed and witnessed," he said. The innkeeper took it.

"A good thing for you Raymond is late! You've been slow."

"I had to string up the stubborn devil three times and then go to work on him with hot pincers," said Francesco. "But he gave in at last. He can still walk."

"Give him a horse and turn him loose. Then tell Maria to prepare the big upper chamber; guests are coming. Is the meal ready for Duke Raymond?"

"Aye. And speak of the devil—there he is!"

A clatter of hooves from the courtyard, a ringing, impetuous voice; the host went rushing out, grooms appeared from nowhere, and the Black Bull took on life. Ser Nicolo gulped hastily at his wine and stood up to meet the man he served.

Raymond of Corthia strode in, bidding his half-dozen guards make themselves scarce in the kitchens. He took the parchment, glanced at it, and tucked it away with a nod. He looked at Ser Nicolo, and came eagerly to him, like a hawk pouncing.

"What's this? You, Nicolo? Corpo di Baccho! I thought you were in Genoa!"

Ser Nicolo bowed; greatest assassin in Italy he might be, but to Raymond of Corthia he was mightily respectful, and with reason.

Ruler of a tiny hill-estate that was no more than a town, with a few square miles outside it, Raymond was slim and straight and powerful; no man could stand before him with wit or weapons, and none had ever found



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mercy at his hands. His dark features were all alive with a cruel and mocking energy. No woman, it was said, could resist his gay spirit and his crafty tongue. He was feared, dreaded, hated, from the Alps to Tarentum, and no one dared lift finger against him. From Venice to Naples, the threads of political intrigue were in his hands, and he pulled them shrewdly; ambassadors were sent to him as to a king, for his counsel and help. He was behind the scenes on many a stage, but was still ruled by three passions greater to him than any ambition.

"So! Something's up, eh?" He swung a chair around, sat down, poured wine and sipped it. "Weapons, jewels or women?"

Ser Nicolo repeated his story. Ray-

mond listened; he was clad all in black, with a bulk to his shoulders that hinted at chain mail under the black velvet.

"I didn't see the woman; I hear she's fair and young," concluded Ser Nicolo. "But the two of them skipped out with all the old man's jewels—the finest lot of gems in all Genoa, I hear. They're headed for Rome. The Frenchman is some sort of soldier; he speaks Italian."

Raymond frowned slightly. "Hm! That's curious. The Grand Duke of Tuscany has been fool enough to disregard my advice, and let Mazarin cozen him into turning the English out of Leghorn; do away with all free trade and put Leghorn into the hands of French merchants. I've been expecting some courier from Paris—well, well, this would hardly be the man, if he's running away with a Genoese damsel! Nicolo, we'll handle this little matter ourselves, you and I."

"Gladly, my lord," and Ser Nicolo smiled in his thin face. "Their coachman is my man. That leaves the Frenchman alone. Shall I dispose of him?"

"Not before I give the signal," Raymond glanced up, as the innkeeper approached. "Dinner? Not yet. In half an hour; I'll have two guests to join me. Get the board ready. Keep those men of mine out of sight, and don't let them drink too much. I may need them. Bring a flask or two of my own wine. Ha, Nicolo! You know steel. Look at this! A gift from the Grand Duke at Florence, to make up to me for disregarding my counsel. The old fool! Think what the Medici have come to, that such a man should rule Tuscany!"

He whipped out his sword from its sheath and Nicolo took the long straight blade, eyeing it shrewdly. A

beautiful piece of steel, with the watered markings of damascened work, inlaid along one side of the blade with an Arabic inscription in gold. The eyes of Ser Nicolo glittered, and Raymond laughed softly.

"You like it? Then, in testimony of my love for you, keep it!" Raymond unbuckled the belt, passed it and the scabbard across the table. "No, I insist! You need a sword, Nicolo. My dagger is all I need."

He touched the extremely long poniard at his right hip. Ser Nicolo gulped out his thanks for the princely gift and waxed warm in his enthusiasm. The eyes of Raymond dwelt upon the man for an instant, a touch of cruel amusement in their dark depths, then flitted to the table that was being set with linen and silver and Venetian glass—strange treasures to find in a roadside inn! But then, the Black Bull was a strange place.

A MAN from outside came running in; the coach was approaching and men were posted to stop it if need were. Raymond rose and sauntered outside. There was a creaking, a rumble and a squeak of brakes, a banging of hooves; a coach with four horses appeared and swung into the inn-yard. The driver was a gangling fellow with the scarred features of a bravo, and shaggy red hair dangling about his ears; a rogue, thought Raymond, and a rascal.

The coach door opened. A man in dark but handsome attire leaped out and burst into vehement French, to which the driver replied; master and man, Raymond gathered. As the driver pointed out, one horse was lame. Perhaps another could be procured here. The Frenchman turned to the

innkeeper, who swore that extra horses were rare as green cheese from the moon. Then Raymond stepped forward, with his graceful, gallant bow.

"Your pardon!" he said, in his most charming way. "I'm named Messire Raymond, I'm a gentleman of Corthia, and if you'll do me the honor of joining me at dinner, it'll give me the greatest pleasure in the world! The food here is superb, I assure you. The beds are like those of the blessed saints in Paradise. The sun is sinking—why go farther and fare worse?"

The Frenchman's face cleared. A face that looked young but was not; a face outwardly handsome, but to Raymond's shrewd eye full of craft and guile and braggadocio.

"Why, messire, thank you!" he answered in Italian. "I'm the Sieur de Castelmore, a gentleman of Gascony, traveling with my wife to Rome. If this place is safe—"

"I know of none safer in all Italy," said Raymond, smiling. "Let your wife join us, and our happiness is complete! Perhaps she'd like to judge of the accommodations. Landlord! Your best room for my friends; they'll join me at dinner, so prepare accordingly!"

The graceful assurance of Raymond settled everything, as it usually did. A man used to having his way, nearly always has it.

The Frenchman, he noted, wore a long, plain rapier; then he observed nothing else, as Castelmore handed out his traveling companion and presented Raymond to her.

She was tired; as she said frankly, they had traveled fast and hard since leaving Genoa. Yet she was radiant, lovely as a flower, so instinct with youth and character and nobility that Raymond was actually stupefied for a

moment. When he stooped his lips to her fingers, did they gently press his own? When he looked into her eyes, did a flash of appeal strike out at him? He was not certain; but for an instant his heart leaped high. Debauched, depraved, callous as he was to all fine things, here in this girl's face and eyes and voice was something that stirred forgotten memories within him.

He conducted them to the stairs. She was holding a leather casket beneath her arm, as though it were precious. Beneath the dark coat of Castelmores was a bulge, as though something precious lay there. Promising to be back in five minutes, they departed with the host to seek their room, and Raymond went striding back to Ser Nicolo.

"My good Nicolo, you're positively a fool for once," he snapped. "That man is a scoundrel; he looks young and is not. The lady is an angel! Ten to one he's tricked her by promises of marriage, into leaving home with her jewels. She's no common merchant's daughter, if I know anything of character."

Ser Nicolo shrugged. "Her jewels, and herself as well, may be better in your keeping than in his, then."

"Right. Keep your eye on me. When I overturn my glass, go to work on the rogue and blood your new blade. Mind you, no foolishness! Kill him and have done."

"With all my heart," said Ser Nicolo, his lip twisting wolfishly. Killing was his trade.

From the hidden kitchens in the rear, which were used in summer, came fowl and meat fresh from the spits, fruit of the earth and the tree, bread and sauces galore; a very banquet to be heaped along the board, with rare wines from the private stores of Raymond. Out-

side, the setting sun reddened and died. Inside, silver candelabra were brought out and set along the table, blazing with candles of the finest wax that gently perfumed the air as they burned.

Ser Nicolo departed to wash. The burly host came up to Duke Raymond with a low word.

"Lord, next time you have a fine sword to give away, remember me."

"What?" Raymond looked up at him and suddenly broke into laughter. "But not such a sword as that, my honest friend! That was a gift from the Grand Duke Ferdinand himself; and when the Medici send gifts, it pays to look well at them. Ser Nicolo, unluckily for himself, did not look too well; and, still more unluckily, has wormed himself into too many of my secrets, and his sold one or two of them to the Duke of Mantua."

DONNA LUISA, as the girl was named, looked more radiant than ever; she had donned a dress of sky-blue velvet sewn with seed pearls, which rarely became her delicate, fragile loveliness, her pale golden hair and unafraid blue eyes. Raymond introduced Ser Nicolo as a gentleman of Padua, and the four sat down to the board, Castelmores and his lady opposite Raymond and Ser Nicolo. If the Frenchman was not amazed at sight of the Venetian glasses, a treasure such as only kings could know, the girl certainly was.

With every passing moment, Raymond's admiration became more profound. The girl was more French than Italian; she had an amazing grasp of practical things, even politics, and her swift intelligence delighted him. Talking, he learned she had spent six months in Paris, with the family of

Cardinal Mazarin. Her father, it seemed, had known Mazarin. Why had she left Paris? At his question, she hesitated, slightly confused.

"The customs, the life—well, it was distasteful." Her clear, pure eyes rested upon him. In them he caught another flash of appeal, almost of terror. "There, they think all women are alike, given to loose ways—"

"Come, come, women were made for love!" intervened Castelmore. He did not appreciate Raymond's intense interest in the girl; he made the fact plain. So, upon a smile, Raymond suddenly turned all his attention to the Gascon, with subtle flattery.

"You've been in Paris? At court, perhaps? Yes, you have the manner of a courtier. Tell me, what's the gossip about the plans between our Grand Duke and Mazarin—putting Leghorn into French hands? Come, come, it's no secret here! I know all about it, and so do you."

The wine was ardent, and Castelmore was presently persuaded to talk. He had thought the new treaty was a state secret, but since it was not—

"It's a tremendous stroke of business!" he exclaimed. "For centuries Leghorn has been a free port. The English are securely entrenched there. Now that'll be changed; out they go, and the Dutch as well! It means that the entire balance of trade and commerce in the Mediterranean will be altered, will be swung to France!"

"It means more than that," Duke Raymond said softly. "It means war! The English will stir up Venice, Rome and other states against Tuscany. The French will go to war. Armies will be marching through Italy—and I do not like that. It will be bad business for me. I should like to stop this treaty."

The Gascon bellowed with laughter. "You, stop the diplomacy of France? That's a good one! You, change the plans of Mazarin? That's rich! No, no, my friend! The Cardinal has already arranged with your Grand Duke, has approved the proposals, has drafted with his own hand the final terms! Once approved by your Grand Duke, the French envoy in Florence will settle the matter and draw up the treaty. Then the fat's in the fire, eh? And you talk of stopping it! As well stop the finger of destiny!"

"Perhaps," said Duke Raymond, smiling, "even that is not beyond my power," and with his hand he knocked over his priceless Venetian glass, and broke it.

Just what happened was not very clear, at least to the staring, bewildered, quivering Donna Luisa; but to the cynically amused Raymond, it was clear as daylight. Castelmore, like all Gascons, was a swelling fount of braggadocio. Ser Nicolo was gentle, but terrible and deadly as a viper. Words rose high, and Ser Nicolo slapped the Gascon across the face; with this, steel scraped out of scabbard.

Donna Luisa cried frantic protest, but Raymond's fingers clamped down on her wrist, his smiling, intent eyes pierced into hers, his voice gripped at her.

"Quiet, madonna, quiet! He is not your husband. Didn't you ask to be relieved of him? Well, keep your mouth shut and see what happens."

What happened was that honor demanded blood; and all was done very courteously, as between gentlemen. At Duke Raymond's suggestion, the two doffed doublets and went to the wide hearth, before the great spits that were not used in summer; and, again at his word, the steel crossed and clanged.

Silent, pale as death, the girl watched.

The art of fence was not, in this day, greatly practiced. It was cut and come again, sword in one hand, dagger in the other; steel was made for killing, not for the light fantasy of fencing. The Gascon was a shrewd, strong, masterful swordsman, but the eye of Raymond saw that Ser Nicolo, with his long arms and nimble skill, was the better man at this business.

THEY fought, with mounting flame of fierce rage, with clash of steel and rasp of hot oaths—and suddenly there was a snap, a clang, a wild cry. Ser Nicolo's blade flew asunder; the Gascon's long steel drove past his guarding poniard, drove through his throat, and stood out a span behind the nape of his neck.

"Ah!" observed Duke Raymond, on

the sudden silence. "I was right. That gold inlay did extend too far through the steel; it's very lucky I was not using that sword myself! That is, lucky for me. Unlucky, let us say, for the Grand Duke, who gave it to me."

He glanced around. The innkeeper was standing among the shadows, watching the proceedings. At a slight gesture from Raymond, he disappeared.

Castelmore, panting, freed his weapon. He wiped it and slid it into his scabbard.

"The devil!" he exclaimed. "Now I've killed the rascal!"

"You certainly have," said Raymond coolly. "And there's a law in Corthia that anyone who kills a man in duel, is hanged by the neck until he's very, very dead."

The Gascon stared at him from blood-shot eyes.



"And suddenly there was a snap, a clang, a wild cry. Ser Nicolo's blade flew asunder.

"It was forced upon me!" he burst out. "Besides, no such law applies to me. I'm not a subject of Corthia. I enjoy diplomatic immunity! I bear a message from the court of France to the Grand Duke of Tuscany! Letters to the Grand Duke himself!"

"So I thought," said Raymond pleasantly. "It's nice to have the question settled. But all the same, the law applies to you."

There was a stir in the shadowed recesses of the great room. Figures appeared; armed men came forward. Two of them held pistols, and advanced upon either side of the Gascon, and the pistols were cocked.

"Your sword, messire," said a third, coming up behind Castelmore.

The latter knew himself trapped and lost. He glared, helpless; he found frantic voice.

"I thought there was something queer about all this! Who are you? Who are these men? What does it all mean?"

Raymond smiled. "It means that the law of Corthia is enforced, for I am the law—I, Duke Raymond of Corthia! Take him outside and hang him, and do it quickly. But first, give me the folded packet that is under his shirt."

The packet of papers was given him. Donna Luisa, staring at him with eyes of horror, uttered one shrill cry of protest and appeal—it ended in a gasp, and she fell back in her chair, in a dead faint.

The Gascon, bellowing curses, was dragged out. Raymond glanced at the innkeeper.

"Where is that man of mine, Mario, the scrivener? Drunk, as usual?"

"Well on the road, lord."

"Hold his head in the horse-trough, sober him, send him here."

Cutting with his stiletto the silk cord bound about the documents, Raymond laid them out. Here was the passport of *Sieur de Castelmore*, a lengthy vellum signed in the sprawling boyish hand of the French king. Here were other documents in Italian, which had been sent to Mazarin from Florence; these were sealed again with the Cardinal's seal. And lastly was a letter addressed to the Grand Duke in the Cardinal's hand, also sealed with Mazarin's seal. Raymond eyed them, and reflected, half aloud.

"Hm! Suppose I turn all these over to the Venetians or the English—at least, threaten to do so? The Grand Duke might or might not be forced to give up the scheme. He's a stubborn old devil, though, and these Medici are all tricky—hm! No, the safest way is to make him so utterly and absolutely furious at the worthy Cardinal Mazarin that he'll drop the whole affair."

A spluttering, dripping, white faced figure shambled forward; this was the scribe, Mario, once a clever man, now an arrant rogue. Two others came in, lifted the body of *Ser Nicolo*, and bore it away.

Raymond rose, quaffed his wine, and stooped above the figure of the unconscious girl. Admiration glowed in his eyes. He leaned down and gently brushed her cheek with his lips, and straightened up.

"Is she not a precious, lovely thing, Mario? Like a tender flower. She's lost a poor lover this night, and gained a better one; truly, the dispensations of Providence are wonderful! Well, well, to business. You have vellum, I think, and ink, and brains? We need them, Mario. We've used your clever brains often, and now must use them again."

"At—at your service, lord," fumbled

out the scrivener. Duke Raymond picked up the sealed letter.

"Remove the outer seal very carefully, without breaking it, so we can use it again. This letter is doubtless in the hand of a secretary; Cardinal Mazarin is an Italian, and it will be written in Italian, being for the eye of the Grand Duke himself. Now, get to work. There'll be an inner seal, so be mindful of that also; it will bear the Lilies of France, and we must be very careful of such precious flowers. Copy all the preamble of the letter; when you reach the body of it, bring them both to me and I'll dictate what's to be said."

MARIO took the vellum and departed. Duke Raymond pocketed the other documents, and with a sigh of satisfaction, laid aside the matter temporarily. He went again to the girl, lifted her head, and poured a swallow of wine between her lips. She choked, and sat up, staring around. Then, meeting his eyes, she shrank in sudden memory.

"No, no—it must have been a dream! Where is he?"

"Hanged," said Raymond amiably. "And good riddance to you, also to the world."

"But you—you!" She stared wild eyed, her bosom rising and falling to sharp breaths. "You can't be that frightful man, that beast, of whom all Italy has heard! You can't be Duke Raymond; the murderer, the ravisher, the soulless betrayer of everything and everyone! The brother of Satan himself, they call him!"

"No, my dear, no. If I were Satan's brother, then I'd assuredly be an angel! However, I'm Raymond of Corthia, and I love you."

She started. "Love? Oh, you foul beast!"

"Ah, but listen!" said he, and began to speak very earnestly, of himself and his life and the charges against him; of good and evil, of lust and of love, and of many things beside.

Now, there was this about Raymond of Corthia: By the magic of his tongue he had the power of charming man, woman or beast, and could make white seem any color he desired, and could bring tears to the sternest eyes. When he was excommunicate and with a price of ten thousand scudi on his head for the murder of his brother, did he not steal unknown into Rome, gain audience with the Holy Father, and in half an hour convince him that Raymond of Corthia was an innocent man? And it is well known how he cozened the Duke of Milan, who had wounded and captured him, into becoming for a little while his greatest friend and ally.

Thus, it might be expected that this guileless girl would straightway yield to his magic and, like all other women, become his loving victim; but to his great astonishment she did not.

True, she became quiet, calm, thoughtful; she lost her resentment and horror; she even smiled a little and suffered the touch of his hand on hers, and sipped her wine. Yet, when he looked into her eyes, Raymond found there something cool and beautiful and assured, which entirely baffled him. It was like a piece of shining mail which the keenest sword could not pierce.

"I've heard many terrible things about you, Duke Raymond," she said quietly, when he paused. "It's said that you have an unbridled passion for fine weapons, for glowing jewels, for lovely women. I should be afraid of you; but I am not."

And she was not, as he perceived. "Then," he said quickly, "you like me a little?"

"I do not like you at all," she replied calmly. "I met the *Sieur de Castelmore* when I was in Paris; and it seemed I was in love with him. He came to Genoa, stayed three days, and persuaded me to fly with him. Then, too late, I discovered that he was an arrant rascal, seeking only to beguile me and steal my jewels. Yet I think I was far safer with that man, than I am with you."

"Sweet dove, I'd not harm you for the world!" protested Raymond. She looked at him, unsmiling. "See, now! I've rid you of that scoundrel. When you came here, when I met you, I read the appeal in your eyes."

"I thought you were a gentleman," she said quietly. "Those jewels are all I have in the world; take them, keep them, if you'll let me go back to Genoa."

"Tomorrow?" he said quickly.

"Now."

A laugh touched his lips. "No, little dove! I've not seen the jewels; but I've seen you, and you're the most precious jewel of all. You've brought me the greatest luck in the world. If that Gascon had kept his hands off you, I'd never have caught him. I have spies watching for any courier from Paris, and they failed completely; they did not even dream he was the courier, nor at first did I. But see! He's hanged. War and armies are averted, the wily Mazarin's plans are spoiled. You're here, and you shall go to *Corthia* with me, and love me as I love you!"

The scrivener Mario came shuffling forward, and laid before Raymond two sheets of fine vellum. One was the letter from Mazarin, denuded of its

seals; the other, identical in size, was that on which he had copied the preamble of the letter.

Raymond scrutinized them both, and his eye lit up. The forgery was perfect.

"Mario, you're a jewel! Finish this task, and you shall be drunk for a month, and wench yourself to death if you've a mind! You've a quill and ink? Take down what I want written in the letter; and mind you copy Mazarin's signature with care!"

He dictated what he desired the French Cardinal to say to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and laughed softly as he dictated. It was a letter which abandoned all thought of the Leghorn scheme, a letter so filled with contemptuous insult and sly thrusts as to drive the prince of the Medici into a foaming fury.

And all the while, Donna Luisa sat, sipping her wine, and listened.

"That's all," concluded Raymond. "Faith, the Grand Duke will be purple in the face when he reads it! Seek that rascal, Jean Gontier, of my guards, and send him here. He's a Frenchman—or was—and has a nimble wit."

The scrivener withdrew, and a moment later one of the guards strode across the huge chamber and saluted the duke. Raymond extended the king's passport.

"Take this, Frenchman; from this moment you're the *Sieur de Castelmore*, a Gascon gentleman, bearing despatches from Paris to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Take my own black horse and the letter I'll give you presently. Ride like the devil to Florence, deliver the letter to the Grand Duke in person, and then get out of Florence before he reads the letter and has a mind to hang the messenger." He tossed the man a purse. "Here's gold; twice as much

if you return safe, your errand done."

THE man saluted and departed. Raymond relaxed, leaning back in his chair; he filled a glass with wine and drank it off, and met the calm, thoughtful gaze of Donna Luisa. He smiled suddenly.

"What, little dove? The prospect's not so bad after all, eh? Tomorrow we'll be in Corthia. You'll have a palace, with riches, velvets, servants, horses, friends—whatever your heart desires!"

"My heart desires virtue," she said calmly. Raymond chuckled.

"At the moment, no doubt; you'll get over that, my dear. You're no hysterical lass to clap a dagger through her heart because a man has kissed her! A tear or two, a scream or two, perhaps a blow or two; then you'll settle down to enjoy the advantages that life offers the most beautiful woman in Italy."

She regarded him steadily, meditatively.

"A liar," she said reflectively. "A man with a heart so cold and selfish-callous that he's lost all perception of goodness. Poor Raymond!" Her blue eyes softened. "I do pity you, so small and petty a thing you are, when with your talents you might have grown so great!"

A slight flush crept into his cheeks, for it was evident that she meant her words.

"The devil!" He stared at her, and laughed shortly. Then he glanced around, at shuffling steps. It was the scrivener, Mario, and with him the French guard.

Raymond looked at the two vellum letters; the writing was identical, the signatures were identical. The true letter he crumpled up. The false letter, with its inner seal and tie of twisted vellum, he folded over and gave back to Mario.

"Perfect," he said crisply. "Apply the outer seal and give it to the Sieur de Castelmore. And you, Frenchman, remember my words! Once you've delivered it, get out of Florence quickly!"

"No danger, lord; I'll remember." With a grin, the man departed.

Raymond leaned back again, sipped his wine, met the steady eye of Donna Luisa. A silence fell; presently came voices from the courtyard, a ring and click of hooves, and the shouted farewell of the messenger as he departed.

And Raymond, eyeing the girl, found a slow, mocking smile on her lips.

"What amuses you, little dove?" he demanded. "The thought of tomorrow and Corthia?"

"No; the thought of tonight, and the Black Bull. I suppose," she said softly, with a lift of her brows, "you could overtake and bring back that messenger, if you wished?"

"Mounted on my own black Arab, and with orders to speed, not the devil himself could overtake that man!" said Raymond confidently. "Why do you ask such a question?"

"You'll learn soon enough. Are you going to order out my coach, with fresh horses, and let me go back to Genoa—here and now?"

"I am not," he said with cool amusement. "Instead, we're going upstairs, together. And there, you shall show me those jewels of yours; not that I want them, little dove, for you shall deck yourself in them to delight my eye, and at Corthia you shall have such jewels as you've never seen before!"

"Indeed!" Again she smiled, slightly, mysteriously. "Tell me something; is it true there's a price of five thousand crowns on your head?"

"In Venice, aye," he said, and laughed lightly. "They've offered that

for my death. It'll never be collected; I've had more than that offered for me, in vain! Where did you hear of it?"

"In Genoa," she said.

Something in her manner awakened a vague uneasiness in him; he eyed her warily, and could not guess at what lay in her mind. Then, catching sight of the innkeeper, he beckoned; the other came forward.

"Light our chamber, above."

"It is already lighted," said the landlord. "I placed lights in it when they first went up. But, my lord! That rascally coachman of theirs, he of the shaggy red hair, has vanished. There were no orders to put him in a cell; he must have stolen forth and taken to his heels."

Raymond burst out laughing, and rose.

"So much the better! We're rid of him easily. Come, my dear!" He bowed to Donna Luisa, and extended his arm. She rose, and her enigmatic smile touched him again for an instant before she accepted his arm. Raymond flung a glance and a word at the innkeeper. "On no account, disturb us! Tell my men to make themselves comfortable."

They went to the stairs; a flickering cresset there lighted the way.

THE door to the chamber above stood open. Donna Luisa passed in; Raymond followed, then closed the massive door and bolted it.

It was a large room, with casement windows; on the table by the windows stood an iron candelabrum in which two candles were burning. By this reposed Donna Luisa's casket of leather. The luggage was on the floor nearby. The remainder of the room was shadowy, obscure. A huge testered

bed in one corner; huge armoires along the walls, to serve as closets; huge beams overhead, all huge, dark, ominous with flickering shadows.

Donna Luisa went to the table, took out a little key, set it to the casket and threw back the lid. She glanced sideways at Duke Raymond.

"Do you care to see the jewels?"

"Bah! Such jewels as a shopkeeper's daughter might own; not the sort of gems you shall have tomorrow, the sort of gems to become you, madonna!" With a scornful laugh, he took a handful of broad gold pieces from his pocket and tossed them on the table. "There's the worth of double your jewels, little dove!"

She drew a deep breath, closed the lid of the casket, and turned to him. He caught her suddenly, kissing her lips, her eyes, her lips again. She did not struggle or resist, but stood passive until he held her away, looking at her. Then her eyes smote him.

"There are two things, Raymond, you do not know," she said calmly. "First, since leaving Genoa and discovering the true nature of that brute who had beguiled me, I took measures to protect myself from him; these same measures will protect me against you."

Her quiet, unexcited assurance would have been staggering at any other moment, but now passion was flaming in Raymond's brain. He uttered a wild laugh.

"Yes? I'll repay your confidence with another, madonna! A little while ago you said I might have become great; well, I shall become great! I have my plans laid. Soon I go to Rome—Rome, you understand? And Rome shall become mine. You shall go with me; you shall become mistress of Rome, little dove!"

She regarded him steadily, her blue

eyes unafraid, untouched, unmoved.

"No," she said. "I have warned you, Raymond. Now, before telling you the second thing you don't know, I appeal to you." Her voice became soft, tender, musical. "Look at me, Raymond; I'm not the sort of woman to serve your lust. I beg of you, spare me; act like the prince you should be, and spare me, send me on my way! Do this, and blessings will fall upon you. Refuse, and all your ambitions shall end in disaster and death and misery. It is yours to choose, between blessing and curse!"

Again was that queer shining thing in her eyes, which stirred such old forgotten memories in him; for one instant, a sense of shame came upon him, so that his grip on her shoulders loosened. Then the loveliness of her, and passionate desire, swept away all else; he crushed her against him, crushed her lips to his own.

"That for warnings and blessings alike!" he exclaimed, vigorously. "How do you like that answer, little dove?"

"It brooks only one reply," she said quietly. "What about the other messenger to Florence, with the duplicate letter from Mazarin?"

His eyes dilated. Passion died out of his features; they tightened, hardened, stiffened; his hands relaxed their grip. She went on speaking, calmly.

"Another messenger, Raymond, disguised, going by a different route. You could still catch him, stop him! But you don't know who he is, or where to find him. Castelmore knew, but you hanged him and he can't tell. I can tell, I alone!"

In a flash, Raymond saw all his plans and triumph going to smash. The wily Mazarin, taking no chances on a single messenger; his own forgery now on the way to Florence, only to be dis-

credited; and Duke Ferdinand would make him rue that forgery bitterly.

"Then tell—tell me quickly. Do you hear, woman? Quickly!"

"No, Raymond; why should I tell? I'm in your power, and you refuse to spare me; well, do your worst! Torture me, if you like; whip me, rack me, burn me—can you make me tell? You cannot."

And, looking into her eyes, he knew he could not. Fury rose in him; knotted veins stood out upon his forehead, his hands clenched. And, in the back of his brain, was a rising tide of fear—dismay and fear, for his ghastly error.

"I must know, I must know!" he said in a stifled voice. "What do you want?"

"Freedom," she returned curtly.

"Very well," he said, and checked himself.

ALMOST she had won her play. He was shaken, helpless, beaten. Then, as he looked into her eyes, he suddenly sensed something there—something that again stopped his pulses, telegraphed his brain, wakened his faculties. And he remembered, for the first time, that the proposals from Grand Duke Ferdinand had been enclosed in that letter from Mazarin. His head lifted, his shoulders squared, and with a slow smile he put out his hands again and gripped her arms.

"Clever! Little dove, you're clever!" he murmured. "But you forgot one thing. You lie! You lie!"

The blue depths fronting him were abruptly stricken with terror, and at this, he became quite certain.

"No, no! I tell you—"

"Tell me no more," he said, and drew her slowly to him. "The letters from Tuscany to Paris were in this packet

—this alone. There was no duplicate letter from Mazarin. There was no other messenger. Ah, you played it well! I love you all the more for the game, madonna! Kiss me, kiss me, yield to destiny and happiness—”

Fear, horror, consternation were in her face; she tried to struggle, and could not. He pressed her to him, sought her lips eagerly, joyously—and, in this instant, felt something touch the back of his neck. Something sharp, that pricked his flesh; something cold, that chilled his brain.

He turned his head a little and then stiffened, motionless, as he glimpsed the figure that stood behind him with leveled sword blade. A gangling figure, a face scarred and evil, framed in shaggy, dangling red hair. It was the driver of the coach, the servant of the Frenchman.

From Raymond's nerveless hands, Donna Luisa drew away unhindered.

“Excellency, keep your arms as they are; up! Don't move, or the point drives home.”

“You fool! I'm Raymond of Corthia!”

“I know it,” and the harsh voice cackled a laugh. “And I'll get five thousand crowns at Venice for skewering you! So stand steady.”

Raymond obeyed. He turned his head again and looked at Donna Luisa. With a bit of lace, she was wiping her lips, wiping away the touch of his caresses. She was white and still and proud as she met his gaze.

“I warned you,” she said calmly. “I told you I'd made my plans. I bribed this man to serve me; he was willing to kill his master, he's willing to kill you.”

“Fool!” said Raymond. “I'll give you fifty thousand crowns to leave this room!”

“Aye! And then you'd string me up. I've heard of you, excellency; I play safe, and you die here. Or else you stay bound and gagged while we go. As the lady orders.”

Raymond met the girl's cold blue eyes, and laughed a little.

“Faith, you seem in the saddle! You seem also to have meant your virtuous words. Your rascal holds his point steady; he knows his business. You've won the game. Will you accept my word of honor—”

“I will not. Your honor is worthless,” she broke in with cold contempt. “You don't know the meaning of the word! You'll be tied up, bound, gagged, left here; lucky not to be murdered. But I want no murder on my soul.”

Raymond's eyes darkened. An unpleasant prospect; he would be found in the morning, the story would spread, he would become the laughing stock of all Italy. Raymond of Corthia tricked by a wench! A flame leaped in him!

“Stop!” he exclaimed. “Careful, Donna Luisa! No one has bested Raymond of Corthia yet; don't press me too far! I'll swear to set the two of you at liberty, in your own coach, at once. Accept my word!”

“Your oaths are as worthless as your honor,” she said calmly. Her hand went under her gown, and drew out a poniard. “You're the one to have a care! Keep your arms up, while I take your dagger—”

RAYMOND faced destiny; and faced it with a gamble, as always. A gamble on a fairly sure thing.

He kept his arms up, but shot his head and body forward, striking against the girl. She was, as he had figured, slow to use her dagger. The man behind was not slow by any means. The

point of his sword, removed from Raymond's bare neck, drove in hard and fast between Raymond's shoulders—a thrust that should have spitted any man through.

The blade, however, merely bent double. More than once, that shirt of steel mesh, invisible beneath his doublet, had saved Raymond of Corthia from destiny; and it saved him now. He was heaved forward by the thrust, he lost balance, he went sprawling across the floor—but, catlike, he rolled over and came to his feet.

The bravo, with an oath of fury was hot upon him. Raymond laughed, as his long poniard slipped out, met the thrusting blade, and warded it. He might well laugh. A poniard, in the hand of Raymond of Corthia, was better than a sword in another's hand, as he proceeded to prove.

Laughing gaily, joyously, viciously, he warded thrust and lunge, took a deadly riposte slap over the heart, and chuckled as the sword blade bent again on the hidden steel mesh. An oath of fury escaped the bravo. Raymond danced away, keeping one eye on the disconcerted, bewildered Donna Luisa and her stiletto.

"Ha, red haired rogue!" he said mockingly, meeting a new lunge with swift parry. "Ha! You scar faced scurvy scoundrel, I'd fight you with a bodkin and slit your throat before you could—"

Death slid at him suddenly. He leaped away, but it was a near thing; the sword's point touched his throat and drew a pinch of blood. Donna Luisa moved unexpectedly; came running at him from behind, her eyes wild, desperation in her face. Raymond avoided her with nimble step, backed around to meet the thirsty sword, and engaged it as though he held a dueling

rapier. His eyes alight, he faced the panting, sweating bravo with a laugh.

"I've got the feel of you now, red-hair!" he jeered. "Death's close behind you, touching your shoulder, reaching out for you! I'll sign your passport to hell with a scarlet pen, my fine ruffler! Draw sword on me, will you? By the nails of God, it's the last time you'll draw sword on any man!"

Despite boasts, he could not reach past the long sword guard with his shorter weapon; and knew it well.

All this had happened in a moment's time—a swift, slow, frightful moment. The hovering Donna Luisa was unaware that no steel could pierce Raymond from throat to hip; it seemed black magic that he was unhurt.

Suddenly he slipped. He fell to one knee. With a gasp, the bravo drove in a thrust to finish him—but Raymond came up under that lunging blade, which struck his shoulders and scraped away. He came up, and the poniard with him; up and up, swiftly, death in his eyes and his hand. The poniard struck into the red haired man, thudded into him to the very hilt, and was torn from Raymond's grasp. The bravo pitched over in death.

And as Raymond swayed, empty handed, Donna Luisa fell upon him and drove in the stiletto for his heart.

The thin steel shivered in her hand. A wild, gasping cry escaped her, for Raymond was clutching at her. Her hand slapped him across the face, hard; with an access of fury, he flung her from him. She went staggering into the shadows, struck her head against the high bed post, and collapsed across the bed, unconscious.

Upon the room settled silence, broken only by the harsh, panting breaths of Duke Raymond. Silence, and the

raw odor of fresh blood, rising from the floor. Abruptly, Raymond moved.

He stooped over the dead man, freed his poniard, wiped it on the shaggy red hair, and clapped it into the sheath. Then, breathing hard, he took the iron candlestick and went to the bed; he held up the light, looking down at Donna Luisa as she lay.

She seemed as though sleeping, rather than senseless. Her hands were folded across her breast; her sweet features were very peaceful, almost smiling. Raymond stared at her, frankly incredulous, his brows drawing down.

She had failed. She was his. And yet, the hand he lifted and drew across his eyes was trembling. She seemed so like a fragile flower as she lay here! The white lines of her face were virginal, delicate; her long, slim hands were like wax. She could be crushed and broken, but not bent—

Abruptly, the man stirred. A deep breath escaped him; he stooped, touched his lips to her white hands, then strode across the room.

"Landlord!" His voice rang like a clarion. "Come here. Bring a couple of men."

AFTER a moment sounded the tramp of feet on the stairs. In hurried two of the guards and the burly innkeeper, to stare all amazed at the dead man. Raymond flung them a thin smile, a sardonic word.

"You keep good watch, down below. This fellow had hidden here to kill me. Carry him out! Landlord, bring out the lady's coach, harness the horses; lift her down yourself, as she is, and put her in the coach. One of my men, and two guards, will ride with it to Genoa, leaving her wherever she may desire. Understood?"

"Yes, yes, excellency!" exclaimed the staring landlord.

The dead man was carried out. The innkeeper gently lifted the form of Donna Luisa and bore her away. Raymond went to a window and flung it open, and stood glowering out at the darkness, his dark features mutinous and writhing. He caught a rumble of wheels, a clatter of horses, and mouthed a sullen oath.

"Im a fool! Why did I do it?" he muttered, fingers gripping at his dagger hilt. "Something in her face, stronger than anything in me—"

* * * * *

My friend Haberlein settled back in his chair, his eyes aglow, as he finished his tale. I was jerked abruptly back from medieval Italy to the present, and sat staring at him, uncomfortably aware of the hypnotic spell he had cast upon me.

"There you have the whole thing!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "If it hadn't been for that girl and what happened at the Black Bull that evening, the whole course of trade and empire might have been changed—"

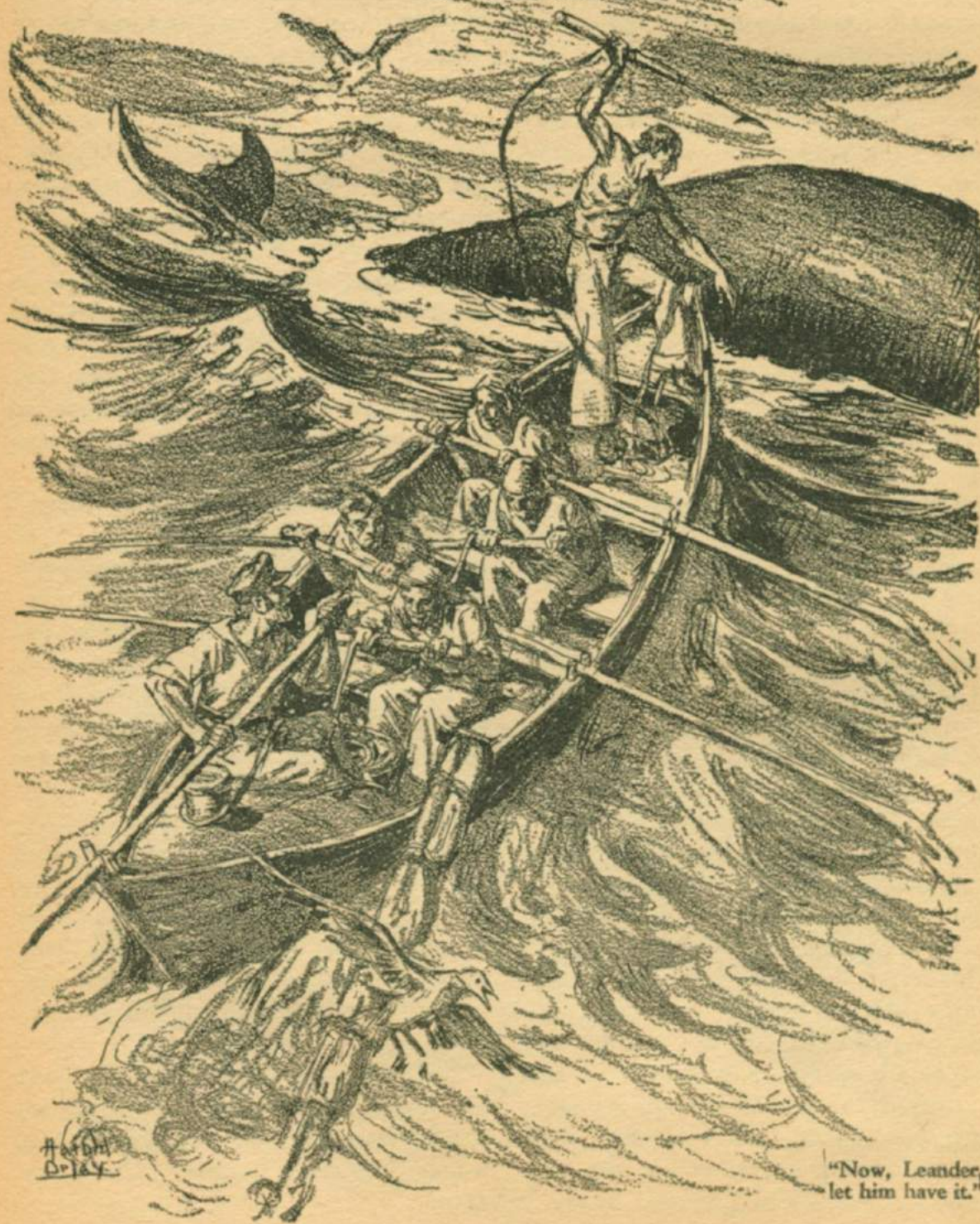
"Devil take trade and empire!" I said with irritation. "What became of the girl? What became of Raymond of Corthia?"

Haberlein shrugged, and rose.

"I don't know," he said. "I was just telling you the story of that one evening—the only time Raymond of Corthia was ever known to show mercy. If it hadn't been for that girl, he wouldn't have blocked the plans of Mazarin—"

I waved him away. I would have given anything on earth to have known what became of that magnificent girl—and Haberlein neither knew nor cared.

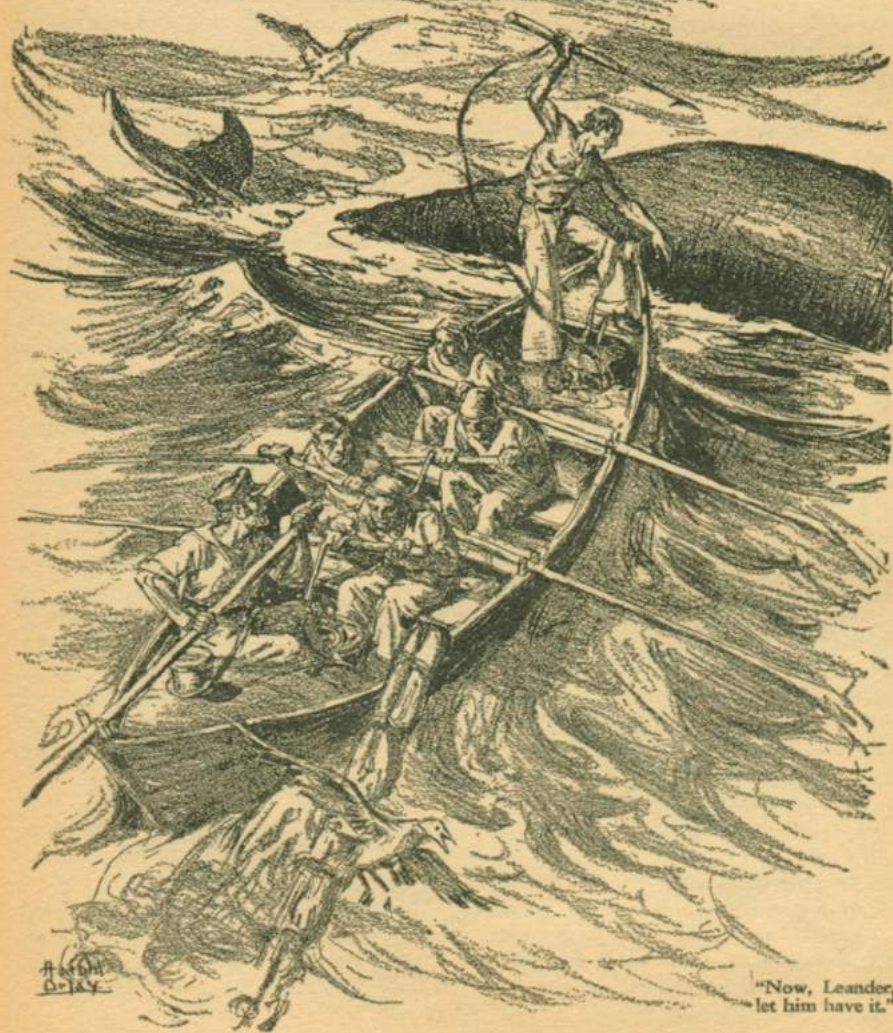
Whales'



A. G. D. J. Y.

"Now, Leander,
let him have it."

Whales'



"Now, Leander, let him have it."

Way



by **BERTRAND L. SHURTLEFF**

Illustrated by **HAROLD DELAY**

THERE WAS LIGHT girlish laughter from behind the high hedge of old box. The flounce of feminine skirts showed under the thick leaved branches.

"Miss Priscilla seems to be enjoying herself," said young Captain Kenyon with a quick smile at the old ship owner.

Gideon Wing chuckled and his shrewd little eyes danced as he sucked in his sunken old cheeks and nodded.

"Seems so, don't she?" he cackled. "But why not, with a handsome young skipper to entertain her, eh?"

Kenyon beamed and lifted a hand to his huge new necktie. A glow of satisfaction suffused him. His success in working his way up to command of a Wing vessel seemed about to be crowned with a chance to marry into the wealthy family, for the old man's evident delight could mean nothing less than his approval of such an arrangement.

Then a deep masculine voice rumbled beyond the box, and Amos Kenyon felt his elation flow away. Flushing angrily, he stared down at the matched flags of the walk, where Gideon Wing's ferruled cane was thrusting at a crack as if to frustrate the tiny ants toiling there.

Captain Kenyon knew that voice. From childhood he had competed with its owner, Burden Chase, at every turn. Now they were both masters of Wing vessels, and evidently rivals for Miss Priscilla's hand. Perhaps—and his heart chilled at the thought—the reason the *Petrel* loitered at her wharf, although ready for sea before the *Albatross*, was that the daughter favored Chase.

"Burden," called the girlish voice, "I'm sure you'll win. I have every confidence in you. But I promised father—"

Amos Kenyon thrust his dark young face forward through the gap in the hedge. Keen eyes focused on the girl's face, he bowed low.

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Amos Kenyon thrust his dark young face forward through the gap in the hedge. Keen eyes focused on the girl's face, he bowed low.

"Did I hear you mention something about winning?" he asked jeeringly. "What's the competition? Burden and I have always been contending for something or other all our lives. If there's a contest on now, I want to enter—especially," bowing low again, "if you are to be the prize, Miss Priscilla."

"She's not to be," said Captain Chase quickly.

Kenyon laughed shortly. "She's sure you'll win but isn't game to offer herself as the reward. Evidently she either dislikes you, Burdie, or hasn't as much confidence in you as she claims in private."

The words did not cut half as much as the tone. There was studied taunt in his smile, in the curl of his lip, in the belligerent way his throat beard thrust out from under his clean shaved face. A girl with less spirit than Priscilla Wing might have been forced to answer.

"The prize is one my father offers," she said quickly.

"And you're not going to add your own pretty self?"

Her face flushed. Her dark brown eyes grew black. Her little head tossed its profusion of dark curls, and her bosom heaved under the tight lacing.

"I was about to explain to Captain Chase," she said quickly, "when your arrival interrupted, that I have promised my father not to bind myself to anybody until his race is over. If he is willing," turning her eyes fondly on the nodding old man, "I will gladly offer to go with the award."

"No, no!" protested Chase quickly.

"Afraid you'll lose?" asked Kenyon coldly.

"No, but marriage is too sacred a thing to be wagered on a race. No matter what the contest, luck plays an important part. I can't let her—"

"You can't stop her, if her father agrees," grinned Kenyon, elated as he saw the older head beginning to nod.

"Priscy," beamed the old ship owner, rubbing the gold head of his whale bone cane delightedly with a cupped palm, "you've showed your metal. A chip off the old block, you be, my girl. Always pick the winner and you can't go wrong. Just what I'd been hopin' you'd promise, but I wasn't goin' to say it. Nothin' like a good lookin' young woman pullin' on the tow-rope to bring a young skipper home in record time."

His shrill cackle of delight sent a chill down the spine of Burden Chase. Deeply in love with Priscilla Wing since she had played in pigtails with him, he felt that the girl had been fairly forced into the situation. Her father had worshipped money so long that everything else was secondary to him. Kenyon, aware that the girl favored his rival, was too eager to marry her wealth to care how much love she brought to the wedding.

As Gideon Wing led Kenyon toward the broad doorway, the girl slipped nearer to Chase and thrust a cold little hand into his great paw. Pleadingly her soft eyes turned up to his. Her mouth trembled.

"Burden, I—I had to. He dared me into it. But I knew," forcing a brave smile, "that you'd beat him."

Captain Chase smiled down at her and his big fingers closed firmly over the smaller ones. Although he knew far better than she the uncertainties of the race ahead, he buried his own doubts and fears in an effort to give her confidence. Hand in hand they followed to the dining room where dinner was waiting.

"What is this race with such a precious prize?" boomed Kenyon, as soon

as they were seated. "I seem to be the only one in the dark."

GIDEON WING chuckled again; those twinkling old eyes of his darted from one stiffly erect captain to the other and then, between them and the candles, to the pretty face of his daughter at the far end of the mahogany table.

"You're wrong there, Cap'n Kenyon," he cackled. "Nobody knows but me. I've hinted there was to be a whalin' race atween you two, but I ain't told nobody the particulars. That's why I had you both out to dinner together."

Silver was fingered nervously. The girl met Burden Chase's eyes with a reassuring glance and then bent forward. "Father, please don't keep us in suspense any longer. What is the race to be?"

The old man smacked his lips over the fine Canary wine his whaling ships had brought to his cellar years before and laughed at them with his delighted eyes.

"None of your little jim-crack races, this one," he assured them, rubbing his dry old hands together. "No chase of a few miles. When I plan a race, I plan a real one."

"To the Pacific grounds?" asked Chase expectantly.

"To that Tali Mahi Island where we're to recruit fresh hands?" urged Kenyon.

Gideon gurgled with fresh delight at their eagerness to know. It tickled the old man's fancy to delay as long as possible. "Child's play," he scoffed. "Twiddle-di-dee compared to what I've in mind."

The girl at the far end of the table was leaning forward now. Her red lips were parted eagerly over perfectly

matched teeth, and her eyes were brilliant in the soft glow of the candles.

"I've purposely delayed the sailin' of the *Petrel* until the *Albatross* was ready. "Not," darting a mischievous glance at Kenyon, "that it has been any hardship to either Cap'n Chase or Priscy, if I'm any judge."

He broke off to cackle at that barb and sipped more Canary. The rival skippers kept their eyes on his face, studiously avoiding each other by so much as a glance.

"I fancied that was because of the movement of the whales," said Chase. "If I'd sailed earlier I'd have had to push up the Pacific to find 'em. This way I meet them far down near the end of their swing."

Kenyon snorted. "Still following your father's crazy notions about migratin' whales?"

"Not such a crazy notion, Amos," interrupted their host. "Lemuel Chase's theory was founded on solid fact, as I'll show you later. But it warn't altogether for that I delayed sailin' for you, Burden. I wanted to start you off on this race. It starts, gentlemen, when you leave this house tonight. It will end," he paused dramatically, "when one of you steps ashore on a Bedford wharf from a full ship, full to the top chime of the last cask with sperm oil."

The immensity of that order silenced the three. Miss Priscilla's hands gripped the table but she was first to find voice.

"And the prize, father?" she barely whispered in the awed silence, blushing with the memory that she had promised herself as a part of the reward.

"There's prize enough for me already offered, without his adding a thing to it," boomed Kenyon heartily, turning to smile at her.

"But I've another prize, and a good one."

Wing sucked his old stumps of teeth noisily, glad to renew the suspense again.

"You've doubtless heard of my plans to build a bigger vessel for the flagship of my fleet? I planned her for Cap'n John Avery, but he died before I got the keel laid. John, as you know, was the line's most successful whalin' master."

Eager breathing could be heard in the sudden quiet as he paused.

"The first of you two home with full casks gets that ship and the command of the fleet."

Too overcome with the prospect for flippancy, the two youthful skippers sat staring at him until the girl's voice broke upon them.

"May the better man win," she toasted, lifting her Canary high and looking deep into Chase's eyes before bestowing a glance tinged with disdain on the scowling Kenyon.

"He will," roared Kenyon, lifting his glass high, "and he'll hold you to that promise. Here's to a quick run and a good race."

"Now," grinned their host, as the glasses were returned to the table, "Priscy will excuse us and we'll go to my library. I've somethin' to show you there."

Both captains were instantly on their feet, bowing awkwardly as the girl curtisied to them in turn and swished away, casting a dazzling smile back over her shoulder at Chase as she swept up the winding stairway that led from the broad hall outside the dining room door.

"This is the how of it," explained Wing, all business as he seized a pointer that fairly trembled with his excitement. He turned to face a huge map of

the Pacific that was spread across one wall of the room. "Cap'n Lemuel was right about sperm whales migratin'. I've proof they did!"

Then, as Kenyon sniffed audibly, being a staunch believer that whales were merely notional in their travels, the old man fixed him with a glittering eye. "Study them pins. Each marks where a sperm whale was killed by a Wing ship. The flags on 'em carry the dates, as well as the ships that killed 'em."

The two stared at the evidence. Making a great sweep around almost the entire ocean, those pins formed a mighty capital C of irregular outline. At a group of islands south of the equator the pins ceased, leaving an expanse unmarked until they again renewed, thick near New Zealand and sweeping southeastward into the Antarctic.

Burden Chase nodded, while Amos Kenyon stared.

"One thing's left to find out," explained the old man sadly. "That's where the whales go from them islands south."

"Didn't John Avery know?" asked Chase at last. "My father always thought he did."

Wing nodded, his thin nose stabbing the air. "Exactly," he agreed. "That's why Cap'n Avery beat every other skipper in the Pacific and filled months afore 'em. He killed sperm whales all the year 'round, instead o' losin' track of 'em for two or three months below them islands."

"But you've got his log books. Find out from them," suggested Kenyon inanely.

Wing scorched him with a glance of contempt. "I've brains enough to do that—if it could be done," he snapped. "But he never entered his position from the time he left them

islands until he met the fleet again off New Zealand. It was a secret he kept, even in death."

"But his mates would know," protested Kenyon.

Wing laughed drily, his old eyes hard. "Would they? Not if Cap'n Avery didn't want 'em to, they wouldn't. Know what he did with 'em? Kept his mates locked in their cabins for a solid week, kept all charts and navigatin' instruments locked away from 'em until his ship j'ined the others. Only let 'em out o' cabin to take the boats after whales and to boss the cuttin' and b'ilin'."

"But his helmsmen—"

"Was, every last one of 'em, Kanaka Islanders durin' them months. That's how he kept his secret and was killin' whales a-plenty while every other ship was idle."

HE RATTLED the pins in his hand, shook his head at the map.

"If I could only stick in these pins, gentlemen, I'd be a happy man. It would make a deal of difference if my ships could work twelve months every year instead of nine or ten."

He tossed them on the desk and picked up a well thumbed book with a cover of imitation blue marble. Opening at a marker, he fairly stabbed one thin finger at an entry. Both young captains bent forward to read.

"This Day a Native Whale Man did Promise to Show Me the Way of the Sparm Whales Southward from This Island in Return for Services Done Him in Heeling Him of a Sickness which Yielded to my Medicines. This Way is a Sekret Knowed only to his People and not Ginerally told to White Men."

"And you believe that?" sniffed Kenyon.

"Records prove it," insisted Wing curtly. "Every year after that, when



"Priscilla was framed in the window."

John Avery was in the Pacific, he took sperm whales while ev'rybody else idled. I'd give ten thousand dollars, gentlemen, in cold cash to the skipper who could bring me that information."

"It's like lookin' for one big pearl," grinned Kenyon. "A full ship and a quick run home'll suit me."

Burden Chase said nothing but he went to the chart and studied the neighborhood carefully. Gideon Wing watched him, smiling to himself.

"Better take a look at that course them whales follow, Amos," said the old owner quietly. "Keepin' that sweep in your mind'll help you fill faster."

Kenyon bent and passed a thick

finger end around that curve, muttering the names of the nearest points, memorizing. Although he had scoffed previously at this theory he could not laugh at the telling evidence of those little pins.

"That," said the old owner, snapping his massive watch shut, "completes my instructions. The tide turns within an hour. Get your horses ready and I'll start the race in proper manner. Line 'em up in the drive, headed for Bedford. I'll fire my pistol for the start. Remember, the finish is to be when one of you shakes hand with me on the wharf with a full ship safely home. Now away with you."

Gravel crunched in the wide drive as the two hired livery rigs swung abreast of the steps where the old man stood with raised pistol. Before him the Dartmouth meadows swept down to cornfields that led to sand dunes and salt water, gleaming under the stars. Then a sash lifted over his head and Priscilla was framed in the window, her face beautiful under the soft glow of the candle she sheltered with one cupped hand from any vagrant breeze.

"A swift race and a fair one," she called. "May the better man win."

"Thanks," called the rivals in unison.

The old man's hand jerked with the discharge, and the startled horses leaped forward.

There was not enough room for both those hired chaises to go abreast between those massive stone posts at the end of the driveway. It was a grim battle down the gravel to see which should be first through. Down the gravel the horses tore, neck and neck.

On and on tore the straining beasts, eager to be home. The two captains urged them faster and faster with

slapping reins and cutting whips. Neither one seemed in the least inclined to slacken pace.

"Give way or you crash," roared Kenyon, yanking his horse's head to lunge him against the galloping grey.

"Smash and be damned to you," belowered Chase in reply, dragging on his own rein to get the same result.

The horses went through side by side. The light wagons, driven hub to hub as the horses collided, were suddenly smacked resoundingly into those solid stone posts. Wood splintered with a crash, two figures, the reins wrapped around their wrists, went flying over the dashboards, and a trail of wreckage and gliding humanity went streaking off down the dirt road, raising a cloud of dust in spite of the heavy dew that had come in, salt from the sea.

The girl screamed, but her father only danced about with glee, chuckling at this evidence of spirit. Then he cocked his head and listened to the shouts, curses, and commands that came fainter and fainter from the road, as the terrified horses dragged their unlucky drivers farther and farther away.

"I'll be down to Padanaram to see you off," he shouted after them. "See that you've sea room passin' the islands. I can't have you wreckin' my ships like you wrecked them chaises."

The shouting stopped. The girl's voice floated down to him, full of quick pride.

"They're mounted and gone, father, but Burden's grey is ahead."

GIDEON Wing was still chuckling to himself when he came down before daylight to clamber into his own

chaise the negro hostler held in readiness.

"Just a minute, father," called Miss Priscilla, fluttering toward him through the dim light. "I have an interest in that race, you know. Make room for me there beside you."

They rode down to the very edge of the shore and waited, breathless.

Down the long harbor, their sails stretched like the wings of some mighty seagull slanting before the wind, the two sister ships stood out upon the long run that would carry them southward around Cape Horn and thousands of miles beyond into the Pacific before they would strike the island where they were to enlist more men for their crews and start the pursuit of the monster whales.

The rising sun tinged the new white canvas with rose, the black hulls glinted with fresh coatings of paint, and white water creamed in a bone at each blunt bow as the heavy ships went streaming off toward the distant sea. A rooster on the *Albatross* crowed lustily and a crated pig on the *Petrel* squealed in terror. Then conch shells brayed a greeting as keen eyes spotted owner and daughter on the shore. Colors dipped. Guns boomed. A faint cheer from the crews wafted to their ears.

"Neck and neck," chuckled Gideon Wing, nodding as the two ships forged past. "Like them two always have been. Either one of 'em'll make you a fine, respectable husband, girl. Get this silly romance idea out of your head while they're gone, and take the one as leads home."

"I have promised that I will," said Miss Priscilla meekly, although her eyes never left the *Petrel* to give the *Albatross* a glance.

"Good girl," he murmured, patting her hand with his own dry palm. "I can't loiter around here forever on borrowed time. Got to be thinkin' who'll carry on for the Wings."

SIDE by side the two barks went tearing out toward the sea. Mishaum Point slipped astern. They breasted Penikese Island and then Cuttyhunk. Gayhead, on the end of Martha's Vineyard, saw them separating slightly, but no observer could have told which one was leading. Then No-Man's-Land, that possible stopping place of early Norse visitors, was behind them and only the open Atlantic before.

"Clap studdin' s'l yards on her foremast," ordered Chase, after a scowling survey of the *Albatross*.

"Think she'll stand 'em, sir?" asked Abel Trueman, mate of the *Petrel*, his seamed face anxious.

Any other master of the time would have reprimanded him roundly for that seeming questioning of authority, but Burden Chase had early established the custom of getting opinions from his officers and even from his men.

"We'll try it anyway," he called with the finality that they all knew and respected. "If we've poor yards we might as well know it now. We've got to be first at the island to get the pick of the men. A lot depends on that. Bend 'em on, mister."

The men were taken from the task of stowing down the clutter on the decks and sent aloft to spread extra canvas to the light breeze. The bark plowed almost directly eastward, to cross the Gulf Stream and evade the upward sweep of its powerful current before heading southward toward the distant Horn.

The sails went up slowly in spite of willing hands. The need for men in ever increasing numbers for the whaling vessels that left these parts had already stripped shore and farm of the most promising and ablest. Of late, ships must put to sea with green hands who must be whipped into shape enroute.

The wind increased. By noon the *Petrel* was tearing eastward like a runaway horse, heeled far over under the strong southwest wind, her cordage creaking. Far to port and dropping steadily astern as those studding sails gave the *Petrel* a decided advantage, the *Albatross* was plainly taking their wake.

"The pick of the islanders," mused Captain Chase, well pleased with his lead. "Good crew often means a quick loading."

A slight squall struck them. They heeled swiftly, came up from under the impact. Captain and mate exchanged glances. The mate, older, more cautious, shook a doubting head.

"We've good spars aloft," exulted Chase. "We'll beat 'em to Tali Mahi."

Another squall brought a threatening crack from aloft. Then, even while mate and skipper prayed it wouldn't happen, the cracking fore topmast crashed under the fierce tug of another gust in the billowing white. Yards toppled, stays snapped, canvas fell with the swaying flutter of a giant crippled bird, to thrash and pound and flap in a wild eagerness to be free.

Before anybody could move to cut the wreckage away, another and another fierce gust hit them. The main topmast, burdened by that unusual forward drag, snapped its stays and pitched with a crash.

"Up and into it to cut away before

we're dismantled," screamed Captain Chase. Then, as his men loitered, afraid to venture aloft, he leaped past them.

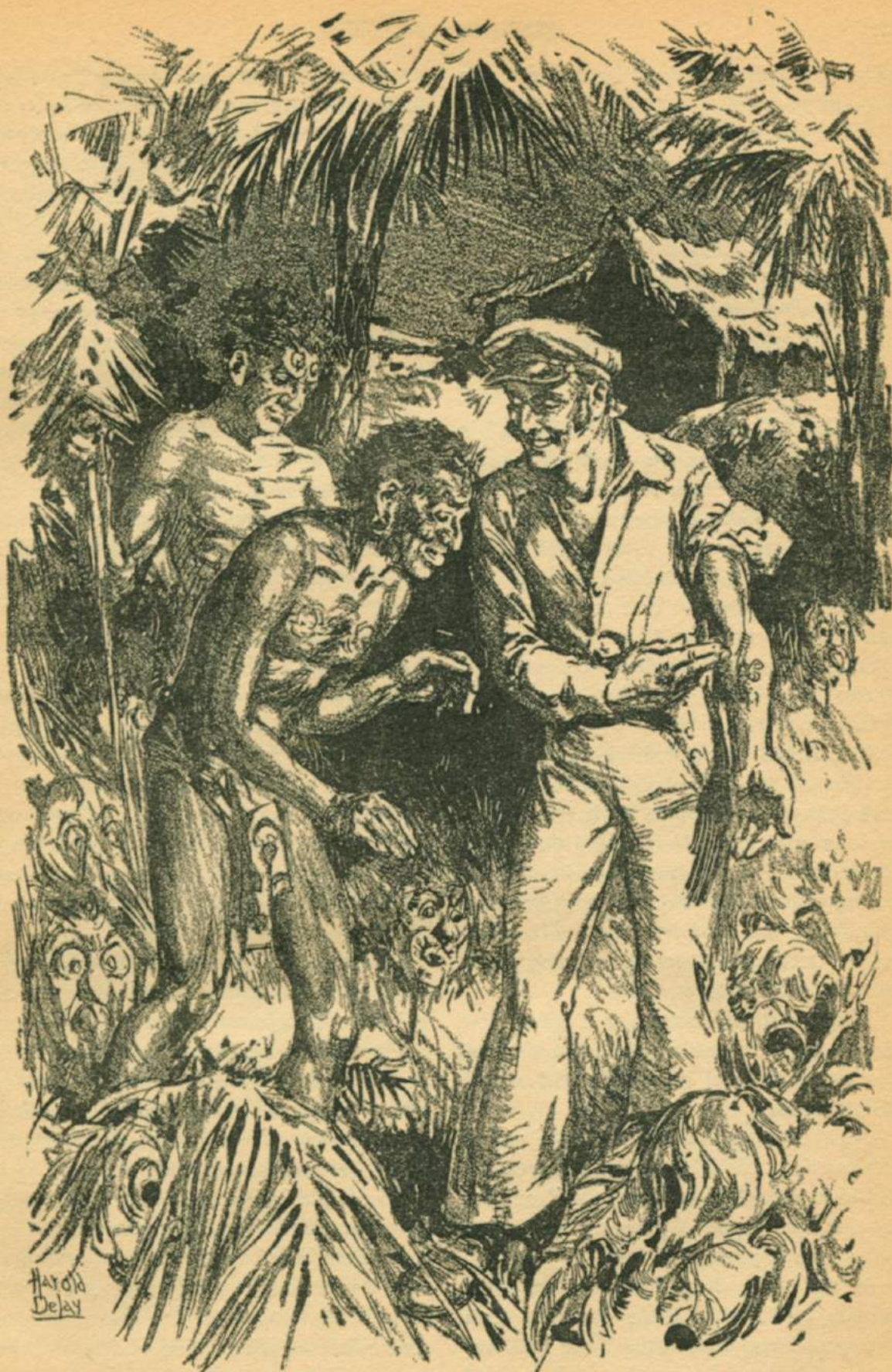
Any other master would have snatched a belaying pin from the neighboring rack and smacked heads with it. But Burden Chase knew that these were farm lads instead of sailors. The roll of the sea had turned many of them a ghastly green with seasickness already. A little kindness in leadership now might bear big dividends in the long cruise ahead.

"Follow us, men," he roared, and waved Trueman into the lee rigging while he went to windward.

Even as the captain hurled by, he snatched a knife from the sheath on the hip of a goggle-eyed starrer. With the blade between his teeth, he swarmed up the ratlines. Eyes flashing, arms reaching, legs pumping madly to carry him up the ropes, he fought to get aloft before that wild mare's nest could carry away the mizzen-top as well.

His left hand held firmly to the stay, the knife flashing in his right. The keen blade sheared hemp, sent billowing canvas to spill harmlessly and relieve the strain on threatened gear. Behind him swarmed the men and Trueman. Their own knives out, their fumbling hands eager to follow the example he set them, they were doing their best to help clear.

Meanwhile the helmsman, at the nod the captain had given him as the mast snapped, had headed them up into the wind to relieve the strain on the gear left standing. With some of the sails aback and the fallen canvas a tangle, they wallowed in the rising seas while the *Albatross* drew swiftly abreast, brought near enough for her exultant



"Here's proof."

skipper to send his hail booming down the gusty wind.

"See you in Tali Mahi," jeered Kenyon,"—if you ever make it. I'd throw you a tow rope, only I'm sure nobody aboard you is seaman enough to make her fast."

Then the wind carried him past, leaving the *Petrel* fluttering like a bird with a broken wing in the gathering dusk.

GRIMLY Burden Chase drove his men to replace that damaged gear with new from the supply lashed on deck. Grimly he searched the horizon during the long weeks that followed as they crowded on sail and hurried southward. But no sign of the rival bark appeared as they raced through the tropics, fought westward around the Horn, and tore across the broad Pacific.

Not until they raised the jagged outline of the island where his owner had instructed him to seek fresh provisions and new hands did he sight those familiar topmasts again. Then he saw the *Albatross* sweeping grandly out from the harbor, her yards filled with triumphant men jeering and mocking the slower ship.

There was no time for a gam, but Amos Kenyon could not resist the opportunity to haul alongside and tell of his success.

"Got the best of the lot," he called exultantly. "Wish you luck recruitin'. Whales reported by the fishin' canoes to the north'ard. Come up and we'll show you how to take 'em."

It was fully four hours later, after beating into the little harbor, that Burden Chase understood the full import of Kenyon's words. There had been no rush of girls swimming eagerly

out to meet them, no throng hurrying to the shore. Instead the canoes were missing from the beach, the huts in the cocoanut grove were apparently deserted, and nobody stirred anywhere in sight.

Ordering a gun fired to announce their arrival, he hoped to bring back the natives, who must have gone in a body to some of their community pursuits. But the echoes rang back from the volcanic crags that towered menacingly half a mile behind the wooded strip along the shore. There was no answering hail of pleasure such as Chase had always encountered before.

"Lower a boat," said Chase, his brow darkening. "I don't like the looks of things."

Trueman sidled nearer, scowling from under bushy brows.

"They ain't strained their selves none hangin' out no welcome signs, have they?" he offered. "You reckon you'll be safe 'thout firearms?"

Burden Chase laughed. "I've been here three times before," he chuckled, "and never needed a gun yet. I'd as soon think of taking a gun to Quaker Meeting at Russell's Mills."

The huts proved as deserted as they had seemed from the shore. There was nobody in sight anywhere.

Fearlessly he started up the path that he knew led to an interior valley where they did their limited planting of taro root. Then his blood chilled at what he saw barring his way.

Stuck on short sticks of varying lengths, their tops surmounted by cocoanut-husk hair and gaudy feathers, two score ugly masks were ranged from wall to wall of the dense jungle that lifted at either side of the narrow way. Grinning, threatening, twisted into horrible contortion, the crude

replicas of fantastic human faces presented a definite check to an advance.

He knew what those masks meant. These were devil frighteners that the natives had erected to keep their enemies from following. Passing those hideous faces was the equivalent of a declaration of war, unless he was escorted past by a member of the tribe erecting the taboo.

Jumping at the conclusion that Kenyon had in some way aroused the anger of the good natured islanders, he stood staring at the masks. The inland valley was too far away for his voice to carry, even if he shouted. If he pressed on, he might be struck down by the blow of a warclub or pierced with poisoned arrows.

Thoughts of the rival bark killing whales to the northward embittered him. Unless he could find helpers on this island he must lose precious time searching for recruits elsewhere. Meanwhile the whales would be sweeping past in their mighty pilgrimage and he might see no more of them for months, giving the *Albatross* a lead he could not hope to overtake.

YET he stood there, respectfully bowing before the island fetish, his heart heavy with apprehension. Suddenly from the corner of his eye he detected a slight movement and turned to stare. Immobile, a nearly nude savage stood within the greenery, perfectly camouflaged by the flecks of light and shade on his painted and tattooed skin.

"Hello, there," called Chase cheerfully. "Do you understand me?"

There was no answer.

"I am a friend of Leli, the chief," Chase called. "Tell him that Captain Chase has sent his son to visit him."

There came an incredulous grunt

from another spot. A second figure, bigger, older, shoved past the first. A scowling face peered out at him, the blue tattooing on the features giving the eye an appearance of startled wonder.

"You Cap'n Chase' son?" grunted the voice.

"I am. You're Hargi, aren't you? Remember how you used to teach me the ways of your people when I was so high?"

There was no confirmation, although the doubting eyes followed the measuring movement. A spear thrust through the brush, its head studded for fully three feet with sharks' teeth. Chase knew that they had probably been dipped in deadly poison. With a slight shudder he restrained the natural impulse to grasp the blade.

The native scowled and came a step closer, his eyes searching the face that had aged and matured since Chase had visited the island.

"Here's proof," grinned the captain, rolling up his left sleeve.

There in the smooth white of his inner forearm was the small blue tattoo mark that he had allowed the island expert to prick into his flesh as a sop to the man's ambition to decorate his whole body, especially his face.

Hargi looked, grunted, broke into a broad grin of delight.

"Cap'n Chase good," he nodded. "You good." Then his face darkened again. "But other white man bad."

Chase nodded, understanding. He realized that the whaling vessels often brought disease and bitterness to these trusting children of Nature. Many a skipper, short handed through desertion and sickness, had recruited by brute force in the islands. Men had often been carried away with the promise of

being returned, only to find the islands thousands of miles away when the ship was finally filled and ready for home. A few of these unhappy wretches had survived the inhumanities of white cities and white sailing masters to trickle back to the islands with their tales of ill treatment and abuse.

But Burden Chase knew that he must find recruits there if he hoped to fill his empty casks with oil. Kenyon was already on the grounds, might even now be fast to a whale. If the *Petrel* was to have any chance in this epic race, he must fill his half empty forecask.

"Take me to Leli," he said.

Although he was eager to be off in pursuit of the whales the canoes had reported to the northward, he knew that he must curb his impatience long enough to satisfy the grievances that the islanders held against whaling masters, or there would be trouble for the Wing ships that must often call here for supplies.

"Leli sick," grunted Hargi. "No can see."

"What is wrong? I'm a doctor like my father."

It was true, for the whaling skipper of the period must be doctor, dentist, judge, and preacher to his family. His kit included the best books obtainable on medicine and the limited surgery of the time. There was even a razor safely tucked away in black pepper to prevent rust from damaging its keen blade in the salt air, a razor that his father had lashed back with fine wire to insure a minimum of play in the handle while he amputated a man's leg that had been caught in the bight of a running line as a whale sounded. The very pair of forceps with which Lemuel Chase had taken an ulcerating tooth from Chief

Leli's jaw, rotting with necrosis, was also in his kit.

Hargi lifted one hand to his tattooed face, pretending to gouge out bits with the nails. Chase understood. That must mean the smallpox, always a deadly malady among primitive peoples.

"Many sick," explained Hargi. "Many die."

Chase had stopped, even as he started to follow the native through the ugly masks. The tattooed face turned back at him.

"You 'fraid?"

Through the captain's head was racing the memory of that lecture he had heard from a doctor in New Bedford, a doctor who had just returned from Europe with new ideas from men who believed that they had found a way to defeat the dread disease, smallpox. Did he dare, limited as that knowledge was, suspicious as these natives were, to attempt to use that new inoculation on the survivors as yet untouched?

"HARGI," he began, "the white medicine men have a new magic for this trouble. It does no good for those who are sick already, but it keeps a man from catching it if he has not taken it. Have many escaped it?"

The native nodded and explained in his pigeon English. The disease had been brought by a whaling vessel. The captain had put some sick men ashore, warning the natives to keep away from them and explaining that the disease was catching. But the kind hearted natives had been unable to stay away from the moaning sufferers. Some of them had taken fruits to the sick, had caught the pox, and had been isolated themselves in another tiny island valley, where Leli was now lying ill with the dread disease. Because the whaling

captain had warned of the need of isolation, the islanders had been able to maintain a fairly successful quarantine. Less than half of the inhabitants had been exposed.

"Wait here for me," said Chase with decision, as Hargi finished explaining. "I think I can save those others."

The scowling Trueman leaped for a rifle as he saw the captain running back through the grove. "I'll hold off the brown devils," he called, throwing the piece to his shoulder. "You're safe now, cap'n."

Chase grinned and sent his own voice booming out to the anchored bark. "Send my medicine kit ashore, Mister Trueman. They're sick with smallpox. I'm going to inoculate 'em."

"And bring it back aboard? We won't stand for it. The boys shipped aboard here to hunt whales, not to doctor no sick savages."

"Send off my medicine kit."

That tone in the roar should have warned Trueman, but the mate was terrified at the mention of the disease.

"I won't," he screamed. "We're all partners in the welfare o' this here ship. The rest of us won't stand for such doin's."

Chase leaped into the boat, his face purple.

"Lay me alongside in a hurry," he growled.

Swift oars sent the whale boat cutting through the water. As the small craft drew to the bark, Captain Chase vaulted lightly aboard to face the ring of indignant men that backed Trueman.

"We're afraid of the smallpox," whined Trueman. "We want whales, not sickness."

Their captain turned blazing eyes upon them.

"I've been easy with you all," he be-

gan. "I've spared you all I could, for I'm the kind of skipper that believes in treating his men like men. But there are times when a captain expects to be obeyed without hesitation or argument. This is one of those times."

Trueman started to murmur, but Chase cut him short with a look.

"It's true we're here to hunt whales, but where'll we be unless we've men to handle the boats and cut in the blubber? A few days spent in getting these islanders in a friendly mood will mean quicker loadin' later."

They still loitered, hangdog and sullen.

"I'm going to tell you men something," Chase said quickly. "Gideon Wing told me, the last night before we sailed, of a secret that Captain John Avery learned on this very island about the course of sperm whales. That secret is worth thousands of dollars. If we learn it, we can be filling durin' two or three months of each year while the other ships are idle. On top of that, there'll be a ten thousand dollar bonus to the man that finds that course. I'll split that reward, according to your lays, with every man jack aboard if we learn the secret."

The shout that greeted this announcement told him that he had won them. Then he held up his hands for quiet.

"But there's one thing you've got to do, men. You've got to trust your cap'n. You've every one of you got to let me inoculate you against the smallpox, just as I'm going to inoculate the islanders. Them're orders, men."

A murmur started. A few who had drawn away from the mate now sidled back to stand behind him. Trueman took courage.

"I'm ag'in it," he screamed. "I don't want to die away off here of the stinkin'

plague, nor live through it to look like a lumber man had been dancin' on me with his caulked boots."

"Afraid of spoiling that handsome visage of yours, eh?" grinned Captain Chase.

There was a giggle at the thrust, then a mighty guffaw of laughter. Abel Trueman could never hope to win anything but a booby prize at a beauty show, no matter where the sponsors sought for talent. In the face of that remark, nobody cared to hold back longer, for the laughter had dispelled their fear.

One by one they came to Chase with bared arms and terrified faces, for inoculation was still a debated question, even among the medical men. One by one Chase gouged at those arms, completed the performance that he hurriedly reviewed from a pamphlet spread before him as he worked.

"I'm like the feller what got it back in Westport," grinned Artie Terry, the forecastle's comedian. "He said if that was only a little pox he'd hate to see a big one."

Laughing, kidding each other to hide their own fears, they submitted one by one. Finally Chase shut his bag and swung over the rail.

"Mind, I'm not promising to discover that whale track," he warned. "I'm only hopin'. If I do find it, you all share in the ten thousand. That's a promise."

Having been inoculated himself before sailing, he was not afraid of the disease. But his heart sank as Hargi led him into the valley where the formerly friendly people were hiding from the twin terrors of the white man and his disease.

Scowling faces replaced the laughing welcomes of the past. Even the women and children, usually naively friendly,

scuttled into the huts with little moans of terror at sight of him. Men stood stiffly to watch them pass, frowning their evident disapproval at Hargi for bringing another white man among them.

Even the explanation that Hargi began in their own tongue as soon as he reached the council house did not assure them. Their faces remained stoical. Chase knew that his father's friendly attitude was under discussion.

"Tell them I have come to halt the disease that burns them with fever and leaves them with the pits in their faces," he offered at last.

But that translation by Hargi was far from enough. Neither was the detailed explanation of the new magic sufficient. They must know why other whaling masters did not use this magic to keep their own men from suffering. They must question and stare and shake their heads, and otherwise delay for hours that stretched into days.

Chase went to their sick chief in despair. He found him recovering from a severe attack of the disease, his eyes running, his skin horribly disfigured. There followed days of explanation to him, coaxing, scolding, threatening, bribing.

IN THE midst of these negotiations, weary with trying to win his way against ignorant and superstitious objections, the young captain was rowed back to the ship one night to find Trueman heading another minor threat of mutiny. Off to the northward, lighting the skyline, the red flares of distant try-works proclaimed that some ship, probably the *Albatross*, had killed and was trying out oil, working day and night.

"This here ends our loiterin'," said Trueman savagely. "Nobody but a

pack o' fools'd stick around here tryin' to save a bunch o' niggers that don't want your medicine. I'm for headin' off and gettin' some blubber aboard."

Captain Chase was tired and irritable. His temper was short.

"We're here and we're stayin' here until I give orders to go," he snapped.

"And we thought we'd shipped with a man, not a mummy cussed idjit," moaned Trueman.

Chase wheeled on him, his eyes flashing.

"I'm man enough to knock your whining words down your throat if you're man enough to stand up and take it," he snapped.

Trueman leered at him. "If I make you say 'uncle' we'll head off to the grounds?"

Chase nodded, his eyes narrow slits. "And if I lick you, you keep a civil tongue in your head for the rest of the voyage. Agreed?"

Trueman whipped off his shirt, standing with bulging muscles and massive shoulders. Captain Chase merely removed his coat and rolled up his sleeves. Although Trueman had a decided advantage in height, weight, and reach, the skipper had an equal one in calm assurance.

The men formed hurriedly, grinning at the prospects.

"Everything goes," called Trueman. "It's a he-man fight."

"Suits me," said Captain Chase tersely.

The mate rushed like a bull, his head low to butt, his great arms flailing like a windmill's. Chase sidestepped and smacked in a terrific wallop to exposed ribs as the big form went past him. The blow brought a wheezing grunt of surprise from Trueman and a roar of de-

light from the crew. Then the big form came charging back again.

This time the arms groped instead of striking.

But Captain Chase did not evade those groping arms. Instead he stepped quickly between them, facing the crouching mate.

The crew gasped again. Those mighty arms were around the slender waist, closing threateningly while the bullet head struck the skipper in the chest. In a quick yank the mate could have the captain at his mercy in a back-breaking snap that might cripple him for life.

But Captain Chase was no novice at this game of wrestling. Even as those great paws locked behind the small of his back and the arms began to close in a punishing hug, the lithe body twisted.

Back to the hugging giant, his own feet wide apart, the skipper bent swiftly forward, his arms groping swiftly between his spraddled legs.

It was evident to the watchers, before his hands found their target, that he was still at a disadvantage. The great mate might pick him up with a crotch hold and slam him to the deck, falling heavily upon him. Then those smaller hands found their quest, closed like a vise around one knee of the straining giant. Even as those great arms clamped tight around the slender waist, the captain threw himself backward against the great chest that was pressed against his back, pulling forward with all his strength against that imprisoned knee and sitting down forcibly upon the thigh.

The backward heave upset the mate, who could not hop back fast enough on his one free leg to hold his balance. Even as he tried a hop, the

lithe captain swung ever so slightly and the mate crashed to the deck, falling over backward with the skipper landing solidly on his ribs.

That crash took all the fight out of the mate. The skipper's fall had cracked two of the big man's ribs, leaving him gasping out an admission of defeat.

As he was strapping up the side of the humbled mate, Captain Chase noted the festering inoculation mark on the other's arm and inspiration struck him.

"Terry and Manchester," he called, turning from the patient, "tumble into the boat and set me ashore. I think we've got their objections licked."

Instead of leaving the men with the boat, as was his custom, he called to them to follow and went striding off up the path. Facing the old chieftain, he bared his own arm to show his vaccination scar and then pointed to the two pussy inoculations.

His detailed explanation won the day. The old chief grinned, exposing toothless gums. Excited at the prospect of saving his people, he called in the interpreter.

But not all of the natives would accept the inoculation. More independent than most sovereign peoples, they insisted upon the right of refusal.

"It's all right with me," snapped Chase, sick of bickering. "I'll give it to those who want it. The rest can take their own chances."

HE WORKED diligently, spurred on by the renewed grumbling of his men, who saw those pillars of black smoke by day and red flares by night to convince them that Kenyon and his crew were taking whales to the northward. When an excited fisherman came running in from the reef where

he had been spearing fish to report a whale lying in sight just off the island, Captain Chase could no longer restrain them. Trueman, ignoring his stiff side, tumbled a crew into his boat and went pulling out through the surf.

Watching with interest, the skipper saw the bow oarsman boat his short oar and lift the harpoon as they slid toward that huge black carcass. The muffled cry of Trueman came wafting over the snore of the surf to reach his ears. "'Vast rowin'. Let him have it, Norman! Stand by to back water, men. Norman, you lubber, iron him! Dart! Dart!"

Suddenly the small figure in the bow bent backward, heaved the clumsy harpoon with its whipping tail of hemp. The weapon arched high, turned point downward, and sank deep into the yielding blubber to bury the barb in solid flesh beneath. Instantly the men churned backward on their oars, the harpooner danced aft down one gunnel to take his place as boatsteerer, and the mate ran forward along the other to tend the whipping line. Even as this complicated maneuver was taking place the monster lifted his broad flukes, rolled his blunt head under with a mighty surge, and flashed from sight with a lunge that brought his great tail down upon the water with a spiteful smack scarcely two fathoms from the retreating boat.

Trueman's cheer of defiance, as he bent to tend the line that smoked overboard through the groove in the bow, followed hard on that resounding echo of the slap. Captain Chase grinned with delight as the boat whirled and shot seaward in response to the tug of that running line, as the mate caught a turn of it around the Samson post in the bow.

"Shall we up anchor and after 'em?" called Second Mate Hart, his rueful face expressing his disappointment that his own boat had not been in at the harpooning.

"No," called Chase, from where he was inoculating doubtful islanders under the cocoanut trees, "let 'em tow back if they kill. A good long pull at the oars might take some of the restlessness out of 'em. Besides," waving toward the watching Leli, "they haven't had any whale meat on the island for months and they're hankerin' for a feast."

"But they might be capsized lancin'," protested Hart, who also itched for action.

"Send a lookout aloft to get their bearings. If they're not back by mornin' we'll put after 'em. A good soakin' in brine might help Mister Trueman's ribs—as well as his disposition."

But there was no need to put after the boat. The lookout reported by dusk that the boat had killed and was towing slowly back toward the harbor. It was long after dark before a faint cry from the sea announced their return. The whale had been lanced some eight miles away and the men were exhausted from their long pull, inching that monster shoreward by incredible labor at the oars.

"Whyn't you come down for us?" snarled Trueman. "You'd wind enough and to spare. My men are half dead from the rowin'."

Captain Chase grinned at him, refusing to retort angrily. "It's a pity you didn't get a chance to pull some of your fight out of you," he chuckled. "I thought it'd serve the same as snap-pin' a few more of your ribs to keep you in your place. Besides, I wanted the whale here."

"To rot and smell to heaven? The natives'll hardly thank you for the perfume."

Again Chase grinned at him. "You're new to the Pacific, Mister Trueman," he said. "These natives like whale meat."

Trueman snorted. "By the time we're through takin' the blubber in the heat, the meat'll be spoiled."

"For our tastes, but not for islanders. The stronger it is, the better they like it."

THE return of the natives to their shore village the next morning attested to his wisdom in having the whale towed back for trying out. Everybody on the island able to travel was on hand. The harbor fairly teemed with chattering men, gay girls, and laughing children. It was a gala event.

Even as the crew swung the carcass into position and lowered the hastily rigged cutting stage, the visitors filled the water alongside and squatted all over the decks. Friendly, cackling in high-pitched voices, or purring in softly slurred vowels, they watched with the eager eyes and licking lips of the half starved in anticipation of a feast.

Chase chuckled at the sly craft of some of the visitors who had attained the decks. One old fellow trailed behind him a fishline as he swam from the shore. As the great blanket of blubber came slowly up the side of the ship to flop down on the deck as a fresh hole was made farther down and another great hook inserted in the greasy mass to relieve the first, he grinned and blinked at the men on the cutting stage, slashing away with long handled spades to fench the blubber from the slowly rolling body in the water as many hands tallied onto the falls and

inched up the great hooks. As eager tools sliced the released slack of the blubber blanket into long strips, others chopped these strips into chunks about a foot square, which would later go to the mincer to be cut in leaves an inch thick, called "prayer books," which would be ready for the boiling down. The old watcher, with eyes as cunning to watch against detection as the shrewdest thieving monkey's, pounced on a chunk of severed blubber, tied his fishline around it, jerked smartly on the end that led to the shore, and grinned with impish delight as the prayer book plopped overboard and went coursing off under water, pulled eagerly by some accomplice on the beach retrieving for him.

Soon the old native plunged overboard to go swimming off ashore. In less than half an hour he was back again, with his line fastened to his big toe, to renew the procedure. In the course of the afternoon he sent half a dozen chunks to those waiting friends and relatives who gathered around with the eagerness of starving souls to sink their teeth eagerly into the raw fat and gulp it down in huge chunks, smearing their faces grotesquely with the grease.

Still another of their good natured thieving visitors spent fully three hours squatted on a hatch cover with the metal ring between his legs. Whenever he thought himself unobserved, he bent and inserted as many fingers as he could in the ring and tugged violently until the sweat stood out on his forehead and the veins were near to bursting in his efforts to steal the ring, all unaware that it was bolted to the hatch and that he could not pick it up without lifting himself as he sat there. He would desist whenever any of the crew appeared to notice him, only to

snatch at the little ring again and resume his tugging the instant he felt he was unobserved, as if he expected to catch in an unguarded moment also the evil spirit that held the thing so magically against his pulling.

Meanwhile the work went on with a will. The huge hook carried for that purpose had been inserted in the head of the whale while the rest of the crew was engaged in the rigging of the stage. The neck had been severed, too, while the blanket was being started, so that the front third of the mighty beast could be cut away for the preservation of the case and its valuable spermaceti content. Then, with the great head left dangling, to be attended to later, all hands swarmed to the task of cutting in that blanket, that the body might be turned over to the natives as soon as possible.

Eager brown boys and men leaped to carry out every suggestion given by men or officers. Never before had Captain Chase seen a whale stripped so swiftly.

Men and boys laughed and slapped at nearly nude girls who draped themselves in alluring postures over every available bit of deck or hung from the futtock shrouds to ogle down at them. The air resounded with giggles, kisses, laughter, and jeers.

"Leave go that little beauty, Ike Brown," roared a jocose voice, "or I'll tell your Miranda on you."

"You're a fine one to talk, Mart Davol, with your Nancy to home look-in' after your forty-'leven brats while you're lallygaggin' with two-three pretty gals yourself," retorted the unabashed Isaac, returning instantly to the pleasure of soft lips that were delightedly learning the joys of the white man's habits.

Blood and grease spread over the ship and the workers. The tropic sun burned low and night was upon them. The mincers clattered and sliced away over the hogsheads, chopping the chunks of blubber into leaves held together by a bit of skin but separated to allow the heat to penetrate quicker and thus facilitate the cooking down.

With the coming of darkness the fires were lighted in the brick tryworks. The great kettles were filled with the chopped fat. Sputtering and hissing, the cooking turned from bloody white daubs to the hot and swimming oil that must be skimmed and bailed into the cooling pans before being transferred into casks.

The excitement scarcely lessened with the darkness. The fires gave sufficient light to carry on the task of cutting in. The crew stood watch and watch, but the natives remained in a body. Couples slid into dark corners for secrecy. Girls crowded into cabins and forecastle, unabashed by any feeling of impropriety. Success was upon them. The sea had yielded its treasures. The island was saved from semi-starvation and the crew from threatened mutiny.

Eighty-three barrels of oil lay cooling off and shrinking in the casks when the head was at last cast off and allowed to sink in the clear water of the harbor. The body had been cut away long before, after being stripped of all its blubber and much of its tainting meat, the latter going ashore in the native canoes for a mighty feast. Now, while the crew cleaned ship and washed down, the body and head of their victim lay some four fathoms under them, swarmed over by devouring fishes and swelling steadily with the gases of decomposition.

By the time the supplies of fresh meat had been devoured, the carcass lifted, a bloated stench to the nostrils, and drifted ashore. Over it swarmed the natives, eagerly cutting away more and more of the over-ripe flesh to eat it greedily in spite of the horrible odor.

"It's time we were out of here," grinned Captain Chase to his mates, who were wrinkling their noses at the scent from the sand spit where the carcass lay in the wash. "Chief Leli has promised me my pick of his boys, since we halted the smallpox epidemic and brought them food in plenty."

"Has he told you about that secret whale way?" asked Trueman greedily, his eyes shining.

"Not yet, but I'm hoping he will by the time we come back next year. By that time he'll have had a chance to make sure that those inoculations worked."

THEY took their anchor reluctantly, spurred on only by the fact that every night the flares of trying out were red on the northern horizon, and finally got under weigh, decks cluttered with live pigs in crates and two or three tons of cocoanuts, breadfruit and plantains. Water casks had been freshly filled at the nearby river, and all was in readiness for a long stay on the grounds.

Heading northward on a long tack, they sighted a whale boat under sail and luffed up to cut across its bow as Chase made out the huge *W* in its upper corner. That letter was a Wing marker, helpful in picking up the boats hunting near the fleet, and the great *A* under it proclaimed that this was an *Albatross* boat.

But the boat seemed intent on evading them. Instead of holding to its

course it veered sharply. Captain Chase lifted a spyglass to study the occupants. Suddenly he ducked for his cabin to come up holding a rifle. His face was stern as he jerked the weapon to his shoulder and sent a bullet skipping across the waves just ahead of the hurrying boat.

Instantly there was excitement in the smaller craft. Brown figures gesticulated wildly. The rifle barked again. The second bullet splashed nearer, barely missing the long steering oar.

The boat whipped about before he could thrust in another shell and slid toward the bark. Scowling brown faces were lifted as the boat finally luffed up under the ship's counter.

"What's this?" demanded Chase sternly, his rifle in evidence. "Where's your officer?" For there was no sign of a white man with the four frightened natives blinking at him.

"We sick," said the sullen oarsman, putting a hand to his belly, his eyes lowering.

"But Captain Kenyon would never send sick men off alone in a boat. What's the meaning of this?"

"Others sick," waving at the three. "Me not sick much. I take home men. Ship too busy killin' whale."

"Come aboard here. Let's see what's the matter with them."

The face became more furtive, the eyes even more evasive.

"Bad sickness. You catch."

He moved his oar hopefully but the ringing command killed his last lingering hope.

"You come aboard here. I'll take a chance on catching whatever it is. It looks to me like homesickness. I'm afraid *you're not the ones to die of it.*"

Dumbfounded, the men stared at

him with terrified eyes. Obediently they came slowly up the dropped ladder.

Chase examined the first one swiftly, feeling for pulse and fever, looking at tongue and throat.

"Just homesickness," he nodded grimly, "as I feared. But it might have been fatal to somebody, eh? Mister Trueman, tow the boat astern, after getting the last man aboard. This looks serious."

The natives wilted at that and poured out what he felt sure was but a partial confession. Captain Kenyon had taken them against their will as they were intent on their fishing for starving relatives and neighbors. He had worked them hard, fed them poorly, abused them greatly. Their lacerated backs bore testimony to their beatings. Kenyon had lived up to the prevailing custom among whaling masters in their dealings with natives.

"So run away. Take boat," the evasive spokesman continued.

Captain Chase looked him in the eye with a severe frown. He knew Amos Kenyon too well to believe that he had left his boats unguarded so that disgruntled natives might steal one and escape.

"Where is your officer and the other oarsman?" he demanded sharply.

One of the renegades moaned in terror at what he considered in his simplicity to be a supernatural understanding of their crime.

"You have killed them and thrown them overboard," Chase accused sharply.

Terrified denials flowed from trembling lips, but he knew that he had guessed the truth. He turned to Trueman.

"They're deserters at least, probably



"Couples slid into dark corners for secrecy."

murderers. We've got to take them back to Cap'n Kenyon. Put them in irons."

The native members of the *Petrel* crew crowded around the prisoners. The atmosphere of joy that had pervaded the bark since the taking of the whale was suddenly changed to gloom. The white members of the crew began to look upon their jolly and light-hearted comrades as potential killers. Under their surface joy and gaiety lurked a viciousness the ready smiles concealed.

The natives, on the other hand, were angry over the tales the prisoners told of the treatment they had received. Captain Kenyon had been adamant in the face of their entreaties to be left

on the island to fish for their sick. From the moment of seizure he had made slaves of them, lashed them when they did not jump at command, accepted their bewilderment at strange names and duties as refusal to comply, and lashed all the more.

Captain Chase listened grimly as his own natives explained the situation. To them the renegades were justified in whatever they had done to win to freedom, since the initial fault lay with their white captors. Although he was forced to admit to himself that they were right in their claims, he dared not set the prisoners free, as they requested, nor promise not to return them to Kenyon. According to the custom of the times he would be derelict in his

own duty if he complied. Much as he condoned them for striking for freedom, he must uphold the white man's standards.

He knew all too well what Kenyon's reaction would be. Bred in the harsh school of a brutal whaler himself, he would be even more brutal in his treatment of the renegades. Nothing but death stared them in the face and that death probably by flogging, unless Chase could intercede for them.

HE found the *Albatross* hove to with the stinking carcasses of two whales lashed to her side as she rolled and heaved in the swell.

"So you picked up my boat?" roared Captain Kenyon, clinging to the futtock shrouds with a great arm. "Well, set 'em aboard. That second whale's softenin' already and the first one ain't cut in yet. We'll be lucky if we can get 'em cleaned with all hands at it."

Then he allowed a triumphant grin to spread across his face. "How you doin', Cap'n Chase? Get any hands at Tali Mahi?"

"Enough and to spare, and a whale while we waited. Eighty-three barrels."

Kenyon guffawed loudly.

"Do you hear that, men?" he belled. "They think they're racin' with us and they've eighty-three barrels o' oil aboard. Do you know what I've got, Cap'n Chase? Four hundred barrels topped off and fifty coolin', to say nothin' o' these two whales alongside."

Chase could not keep the hint of scorn from his voice. "And a first class case of mutiny to deal with, if I'm not mistaken. I picked up your boat as it was making for the island. Only four natives aboard."

He read the consternation in that staring face. The dark throat whisks crushed against the shirt front as that jaw dropped in disbelief, giving the shaven portion of the face unusual length and a greenish pallor under the tan.

"But where's Mister Macomber and Nate Dring?"

"That's something we'll have to find out. My guess is that they're murdered and thrown overboard."

Flashy blades halted in mid air. Laboring bodies turned to statues. And the murmur of an angry undertone floated over the water from the weary workers.

"A pity it warn't Kenyon they got," called a shrill falsetto above that murmur. It was plainly a disguised voice, but it was full of meaning.

"Who said that?" roared Kenyon, turning upon them.

Nobody answered. Pleading eyes begged in vain for mercy as they centered on that stern face.

"Speak up, or I'll cut your rations in half until somebody does. I'll have that mutinous rascal triced up and flogged, or your empty guts'll stick to your backbones. Come on, who said it?"

Faces blanched in the awed silence. The dread of still further abuse was so strong that the men aboard the idling *Petrel* could sense it across the intervening stretch of water.

"They're already hard worked and none too well fed," suggested his mate placatingly.

"Stow your lip until it's asked for," snapped Kenyon. "Cookie?" Then, as the filthy cook looked up from where he had been waiting for some of the whale meat to cook for dinner: "Half rations for 'em until further notice."

"But the meat'll only go bad," protested the cook, who could understand short rations if they saved the company money.

"You heard me, you insolent whelp," advancing on him with swinging fists. "Give 'em no meat and half their ration of bread."

The quailing cook started to back toward his galley, fearful. But his efforts to protect his anatomy by use of the pan were futile. Kenyon seized him by one ear, twisted him around expertly, and planted a vicious kick on his rump, sending him sprawling.

"That's the way I handle 'em, Cap'n Chase," he roared. "Now send them boys aboard and I'll have the truth out of 'em—as soon as we get this blubber aboard and to cookin'."

Chase surveyed him, eye to eye, across the heaving water as their barks idled, aback and drifting apart as the whales held the *Albatross* by their drag in the water and the *Petrel* slid out from the other's lee to catch the force of the gentle wind.

"I think this is a matter for a gam, Cap'n Kenyon," he called.

"Gam nothin'! They're my mine. Send 'em aboard. I'll put 'em to work at the cuttin' in—and take care of 'em afterward, when they won't be so hard to replace. Over with 'em."

"It's a gammin' matter," insisted Chase stubbornly. "Come aboard here and let's settle it."

"And leave these shirkin' fools to let loose the whales and run for it, while I palaver over four stinkin' niggers? Nothin' o' the sort! Send 'em aboard and have an end to this."

Chase shook his head. "This is a matter of company policy. It calls for a gam between the pair of us. Your officers can be trusted to carry on."

"Damn you, Burdie Chase," roared Kenyon, forgetting in his anger the courtesy to a skipper that discipline demanded in the presence of their men, "I'll break you for this when I'm in command of the fleet. If you know what's good for you, you'll send them niggers aboard."

"That's just the point," called Chase. "They're not niggers; they're free men."

"Drop my gig," roared Kenyon. "I'll show the namby pamby idiot who's boss of them dirty murderers."

HE came storming up the *Petrel's* jacob's ladder and onto the deck, his face purple. Chase fronted him with an equal show of determination, his own eyes hard and cold.

"Give me my men," gritted Kenyon.

Chase stepped near to him and dropped his voice so that none of their men could hear.

"Listen," he snapped, "you might scare those poor devils aboard your ship with your loud bluster, but you're not scaring me. Calm down before the men and act like a man, even if you do feel like a spoiled brat. Come on into the cabin and let's have this out."

For a long minute they stood there breast to breast, eyes flashing, tensed bodies ready for combat.

"You strike first, if you want war," urged Chase under his breath. "I want no other excuse for pounding your carcass limp and tumbling it back into your boat. Go ahead and strike just once and I will."

Kenyon measured the smaller figure, aware that there was concealed strength under those shirt-sleeved arms, agility in that nimble figure.

Luckily for his predicament, somebody cried at that instant, "Sail hard

aboard. Looks like the *Canvasback*."

It was another of the Wing vessels, named as were all the others for a nautical bird. The tenseness slackened. A crafty look came into Kenyon's eyes.

"It's the *Canvasback*, sure enough," he called eagerly. "Have Cap'n Tripp aboard to settle this."

The older brig luffed up and her white haired master came aboard to the swing of quick oars in response to the signal requesting his presence. Sprawled on the horse-hair sofa built into the cabin of the *Petrel*, he listened with a bird-like cocking of his small head to first one indignant narrator and then the other.

"This is a very serious matter," he said at last, blinking. "The original crime's bad enough, goodness knows, for murder's always a nasty crime. But the spectacle of two ship-masters wrangling like children over anything is worse than the cause." He paused.

"You're wrong, Kenyon," exploded the judge suddenly. Then he nodded shortly and sharply a score of times while Kenyon reddened. "Yes, you're wrong. Disgraceful in a man of your standing! Brawlin' and bellowin' like a mad bull!"

Chase gasped, for he had expected the older captain to stick by the older idea of nautical justice. A slow grin began to spread across his face at the evident promise that there was a warm heart under Tripp's tight jacket.

"But only in the brawling," Tripp burst out again. "Chase, you're much worse. You ought to know that a skipper has sole right over his own men and gear. That boat belongs to the *Albatross*. So do the men mannin' her. You'd no right to refuse to set 'em aboard when requested. They're Ken-

yon's to do with as he sees fit."

"But don't you see," protested Chase, "that we've got to establish a company policy about the handling of these natives? Soon we'll be unable to ship crews from among 'em. They're better and cheaper than Yankees and we need 'em. Unless we earn their respect—"

"That's just it, just it," interrupted the nodding Tripp. "Respect. That's what we must have, respect and discipline. Unless we have it," accusingly, looking from one to the other, "for fellow captains, how can we expect ignorant natives to have it? Punishment brings respect. Fear's all they know. They'll bite the kind hand, but don't dare to snap at the whip hand."

"Yet they killed on the *Albatross*. I've had no trouble here."

"Which proves what he's sayin'," insisted Kenyon. "Macomber, who had charge of that boat, was a softie. So was that fool Nate Dring who was along with him as boatsteerer. You don't find rats like them murderin' men like me."

"Because you don't venture into the boats with them where they could get at you. They'd kill you in a minute if they got the chance."

"Gentlemen, I have given my decision," said Tripp, rising and starting up the companion. "I shall write a full account of this to our owners—including the disposition made of the men, Cap'n Chase. As arbitrator I command you to hand them over to Cap'n Kenyon."

Chase threw up his hands hopelessly. "You win for the present, Kenyon," he admitted. "Once back in Bedford I'll have my say about it, though. This abuse of natives has got to stop."

"What you say when you get back

to Bedford isn't likely to count very much," grinned Kenyon, "unless you figure on fillin' your casks with the soft soap you bubble out of your own mouth. Come on, Cap'n Tripp, let's you an' me get out of here before we have softenin' of the gizzard along with him."

There was consternation on deck when Kenyon sternly ordered the prisoners into the boat and started towing the craft behind his gig back toward the *Albatross*. One of the men in irons stood up in the pitching boat and seemed to be making a farewell oration to his neighbors on the *Petrel*. His words were received in stony silence as the solemn faced islanders clung to the rigging.

Suddenly, at a ringing cry of defiance from the standing man, the others leaped to their feet from where they had been drooped disconsolately on the thwarts, their hearts heavier than their shackles.

"Sit down, you fools, or you'll be pitched overboard to drown," screamed Kenyon. "You can't swim with them irons on you. I—"

His jeers seemed to stiffen their determination. As one they lifted their heads. Each put a foot upon the gunnel lifting clanking chains. As a high wail lifted from them and turned into a mournful chant, they exchanged glances, nodded in unison, and went overboard in a clean united dive. The clank of their heavy chains echoed, their dark bodies were visible fighting down, down, down through the brine until the blotch blended in wavering outlines with the dark depths and was lost to view.

Sick at what he had witnessed, Chase turned away. His own native workers, after echoing the dismal chant of the

suicides, stared at Chase sullenly. Fear lurked in their pathetic eyes as they watched master and mates moving about the ship.

A PALL of suspicion and terror obsessed the ship as the *Petrel* bore away, leaving Kenyon's wretches to his abuse. Mutiny threatened in the form of a race war, for the whites in the crew were fearful of the murderous instinct that had flared in their less fortunate fellows, even as the native workers were afraid that they, too, were headed for abuse.

Only the sighting of whales late the next day brought an end to the glooms. The waist boat made fast and killed, although the others all drew or were forced to cut. To ease the tension and insure good spirits, Chase served a double round of grog.

The hot liquor gave the men fresh spirits and a brighter outlook. The labor of cutting in and trying out gave little time for brooding. Everything went along so smoothly and so free from unnecessary brawling that the timid natives took courage. Quick to respond to kindness and quick to forget sorrow and pain, they were soon laughing and joking and singing again. When the boiling down was finished five days later and the decks cleaned again, they strummed happily on their native ukeleles, fraternizing once more in perfect accord.

Then another shoal of whales arrived and they put over the boats with every man straining to be in at the kill. In the midst of the excitement, Chase looked up to see the *Albatross* hard aboard, her boats ready to drop. Soon the sea was dotted with idling whales, blowing their spray in tiny founts and jets, with laboring boats gingerly ap-

proaching the lazy monsters, or backing swiftly away after a flung harpoon had made contact.

Every boat was far away when a big whale slowly lifted to the surface between the rapidly closing barks and snorted an exhalation of his pent up breath, which mingled with the sea water in his blow hole to form a fountain of spray over his sleek back.

Captain Chase glanced at the boats, towing seaward or maneuvering toward other monsters. Then he took another look at the spouting whale and at the lone boat still hanging in the davits.

"Shipkeeper," he bawled, "take over and stand by to pick up the kill farthest to windward, drift down upon the other boats and pick them up as they tow to the ship. Man the boat, boys! We're going after that baby yonder."

Even as his boat smacked the water he saw Captain Kenyon stare at them and then at the idling whale. Instantly Kenyon wheeled and raced to lower his own boat.

Since the *Albatross* was much nearer the monster than the *Petrel*, a race developed to see who would be first to dart iron into the whale.

"Give it to 'em, boys," urged Chase quietly. "Show him what a crew that knows no lashing can do before a bunch of whipped slaves. Bend them ash breezes! Pull for kind treatment aboard whaling ships. Show him men're better for bein' able to say their souls are their own. Either Kenyon or me gets the new flagship of the Wing fleet and whoever does will demand his own type of discipline in the fleet. Here's a chance to prove kindness is what you like."

The heavy boat with its load of gear fairly lifted from the water. Backs bent and arms reached in perfect uni-

son. Onward they rushed, steadily increasing their speed.

But Kenyon was working his men, too. Snarling a constant stream of threats, he drove his laboring victims viciously. Both boats were about equally distant from the whale and closing rapidly, but the Chase boat began to gain. Tense in her stern, the skipper watched the narrowing distance with expert eye.

"Stand by to iron him, Leander," he called.

Leander's short oar clattered into the boat and the harpoon seemed to leap into the man's hands. Bracing himself swiftly, he crouched in readiness.

"Back water! Hold her or you'll ram! Stand by to back water! Now, Leander, let him have it!"

The iron sped true. It was a long cast but an accurate one. The clumsy looking wooden shaft stood upright and quivering in the mighty mass for an instant. Almost instantly the huge creature heaved forward in a startled dive.

"Fend off, you robber, we've already struck," screamed Chase, catching sight of the Kenyon boat with the harpooner poised and ready to dart iron. "This is our whale."

"It's still alive," roared Kenyon. "Dart, you idiot, dart at him! Leave the right and wrong o' the matter to me. Hurl that iron!"

The hesitating boatsteerer dared delay no longer. That snarled command seemed fairly to lift the weapon from him in a swift wide arc that ended in the disappearing body of the great whale.

"Cut, you thief; we're still fast," screamed Chase. "A whale belongs to the first man to get iron into him."

"You'll never take him," jeered Ken-

yon. "I'll show you how it's done."

Chase was so busy swearing at him that he was late in getting a turn of line around the Sampson post. Kenyon's boat, traveling in the whale's wake, shot off ahead.

"Killer takes all," called Kenyon defiantly, as his boat picked up speed.

Too wild with anger to answer, Chase merely slowed the flight of his own line, and started his own boat in motion. Later, when the monster began to tire, he could take in hemp and pull abreast of the other boat. Then he saw that the other boat was slowly inching back to bob and wallow and veer and skip a scant five fathoms off his bow.

At a loss to understand just what Kenyon meant by the maneuver, he watched closely. Kenyon called something that was indistinguishable in the seethe of rushing water, swanking impact, and the wind of progress.

Then Chase understood. Kenyon was probing the water as his boat veered wildly back and forth in response to his shouted directions to the boatsteerer. With a savage thrusting he was searching water directly under his bows with that two-edged weapon that was kept at razor sharpness to probe the weary whale's inwards at the end of the chase.

But the whale was nearly half a mile away, driving madly. That lance was questing now for one thing only!

There came a thrum down the taut line that Chase's hand touched. His horrified eyes saw a single strand uncoiling from the tight twist, saw the severed edge, cut by that clean blade.

"Fend off from my line, you vandal," he screamed, brandishing his own lance.

Kenyon favored him with a grin of

defiance and probed again, as a sea slapped over him. Chase thrust the lance back into its greased sheath and grabbed for another harpoon. With murder in his eyes, he lifted high to heave it.

A scream of terror burst from the boatsteerer ahead as he looked back. But the *Albatross* boat had swept over that submerged hemp again. Kenyon, his head and shoulders buried in the brine that poured over him, was thrusting deep with that keen blade, his legs held by an oarsman. Even as Chase cleared the harpoon for the cast, the taut line parted suddenly, and their tearing speed slowed at once to drop them rapidly astern of the other boat and let the arching weapon chug harmlessly into the sea. Instantly Kenyon was standing dripping in the bow, his thumb to his nose.

For one long minute Burden Chase stood there, his mind a seething, blinding red. Then he turned and faced his men, grimly clambering aft to take the steering oar and motioning the boatsteerer back to the bow to row.

"Put us aboard the ship as fast as God A'mighty'll let you," he said in a voice so pregnant with rage that they would not believe it was their skipper speaking. "This ain't the end by a long shot. He started something that I'm goin' to finish."

WITH sail lifted to aid the rowers, they were soon hoisting aboard. Barely glancing at the scattered boats, towing away behind frightened whales, Chase glanced aloft.

"Get more sail on her," he snapped. "Shake out them reefs in the royals."

Kenyon had all but vanished over the horizon but Chase had marked the course of that towing boat. Ignoring

his own boats, one of which was engaged in the tricky job of lancing a whale and trying to escape from the lash of its dying flurry, he headed grimly after Kenyon.

"Lay out the longest handled spades," he called savagely, as they finally drew near and saw Kenyon drive that lance far into the vitals of the gasping whale and then send his boat surging backward to escape the mad lunge of death. "Lay me aboard that whale of ours, helmsman. Luff her up between boat and carcass."

"Between boat and carcass, sir?" asked the abashed man at the wheel.

"You heard me. Straight between 'em."

"But there's no goin' between 'em, sir. He's closin'."

"Force your way between 'em, if you sink him."

Leaping into the bluff bow, he glowered down at the nervous Kenyon, whose smile had faded from his face.

"Fend off," snarled the master in the boat. "You'll run me down."

"I will if you don't leave my whale alone and put back to your own ship, you dirty pirate."

"A whale belongs to whoever kills it."

"This one'll belong to whoever tries it in—and that'll be me. Hand me that spade, boy. Unless you draw your iron, Kenyon, and head back for your ship, I'll chop your bottom out from between your feet and sink you."

"It's piracy!"

"A fine word, comin' from you. Put us between 'em, helmsman!"

The bluff bow struck the inert carcass with a thud that shook the ship. Then the bow edged slowly between boat and carcass.

"Fend off or I jab you," snarled

Chase. "I'll show you how to steal a whale, if you really want to see it done. Get out of here!"

"This is war, damn your stinkin' hide!"

"And you began it. I'll give you all you can take. You may think I'm a lily livered thing because I don't stand for beating the flesh off a man's back because he dares to say his soul's his own, but you'll find me the nastiest fighter you ever tackled if it comes to war."

"Well, it is war from now on—without quarter. Keep your stolen whale, but you'll pay dear for it."

THE disgruntled Kenyon went off, trembling with rage. Chase did not relax until the last of his boats came slowly alongside towing their catch. Then, with every man accounted for and his ship surrounded by dead whales with hundreds of dollars' worth of oil waiting to be tried out, he could afford to chuckle over his final routing of the rival.

"Mighty nice of him to kill our whales for us," he told the skeptical Trueman, as they surveyed the tons of dead blubber.

"But you'll pay for it," moaned his mate. "You can't play around a buzz saw without gettin' hurt. He's bested you once, remember."

"But he ain't goin' to best me again," defiantly. "From now on he'll know he's in a race with a man."

For eight days they labored like beavers at cutting in and cooking out their surfeit of blubber. Blood and grease were everywhere. They tumbled into their bunks like numb things and slept unwashed. They ate with slippery fingers. They hacked and chopped with hands so daubed that it

was a wonder they had no more accidents, although cuts were plentiful.

The whales began to bloat in the heat of the tropic sun, but hundreds of dollars' worth of oil could not be abandoned because of ripeness of scent.

Finally the rotting condition halted them from further activities when the great hooks tore free and the swollen carcasses went veering off before the wind like half submerged rubber balls. Then there still remained the ghastly task of cooking down the blubber that remained, much of which had to be shoveled into the kettles, it was so soft.

The *Albatross*, busy at her own try-works, had drifted away from them. Since there were no more whales in sight, Chase ran for the island to give his men a little rest. That shoal of whales had evidently been the rear guard of the migrating herds, for the ship sighted not another blow as she slid toward Tali Mahi.

Then, barely five miles off the island, they overtook the rear guard again. A lone bull, snorting his spray, was idling along in the warm water.

The boats went over, the men tugging madly at the oars. But the whale seemed inclined to play tag with them. He sounded leisurely, remained under fully fifteen minutes, and then came up a half mile to starboard, instantly advertising his presence to the searching hunters by a jet of spray.

Instantly the boats set off in pursuit, oars flashing. Burden Chase stood on the deck of his bark watching grimly as he saw the whale headed eastward and noted the patched topsails of the *Albatross* heaving above the horizon ahead. Kenyon had warned of war and here was a whale directly between the two vessels.

As if to precipitate trouble, the mon-

ster idled until the approaching ship was almost upon him. Then he lay at ease, apparently indifferent to these puny men. Ordinarily a whale would have sounded with a rush, but he remained as the boats drew nearer, apparently stupefied and unmindful of the safety that lay in a deep dive.

The *Albatross* could not head into the wind and lower her boats in time to beat the *Petrel* attackers at the harpooning. Under ordinary circumstances the sister ship would have stood away to avoid frightening the creature, but Kenyon grimly gave orders to hold to his course. Even as the leading boat drew near enough for the harpooning order to be given, the ship tore down upon the idling whale. Lifting high out of water, the tearing bark was too much for the studied equanimity of that indifferent beast. As Kenyon screamed to add noise to the fright, the whale lurched downward, gone before that harpoon could be hurled.

Kenyon's mocking laughter rang over the loud cursing from the boats. Delighted, he luffed up beside the *Petrel*, and the two captains exchanged a searing flow of remarks.

"And you lay off stealin' islanders from Tali Mahi," warned Chase, "or I'll make trouble. They're my friends."

"All the more reason why I'll steal some more."

"I'm makin' Chief Leli a present of a couple of Sharps rifles. Maybe you'll respect them. I'm headin' ashore now to do it."

"And I'm headin' in for men. I need half a dozen to replace the sick and them murderers."

The ships swung off on a race toward the island, which loomed like a dark

blue cloud to the southward. Kenyon made a longer reach to the eastward and luffed up to lower. Instantly Chase came about and after him. Lowering during such a race could mean but one thing. The *Albatross* had sighted blubber.

The guess was good. The lookout called down excitedly that a single bull whale, perhaps the very one they had chased a few hours before, was off the stern of the idling rival bark, with the boats pulling after him.

CHASE'S face was grim as he turned and called sharply, "Bring my rifle from the cabin."

"What you goin' to do?" asked Trueman in a frightened voice.

"Do? By God, I'm goin' to do just what the skunk did to my boats. He declared war, so I'm goin' to keep on firin' until he runs up the white flag. I'll show him who's a mollycoddle."

Up the ratlines he went, lurching along with but one hand to jerk from hold to hold, the other gripping the heavy Sharps. At the lubber's hole, he thrust the rifle through to balance it on the flooring while he swung with back to the deck to scramble up the platform and over the edge. In another instant he was sighting the rifle toward that distant scene.

"Be careful you don't kill nobody," screamed Trueman. "You don't want murder on your hands."

Chase laughed nastily and fired. There was no movement to indicate that his bullet had brought results. He shoved in a brass jacketed shell and sighted again. Once more the weapon kicked savagely against his shoulder.

For an instant, after stooping quickly and blowing the smoke from the barrel, he thought that he had missed

again. Then he saw the great whale start to glide along the surface, his spray high over his back.

But the men in the pursuing boats redoubled their efforts and the nearest harpooner lifted to the attack. Chase grimly drew bead again on that moving leviathan.

This time the broad fluke lashed viciously, and the monster went hurtling down through the water with a mad rush that told of stinging pain somewhere in his great body.

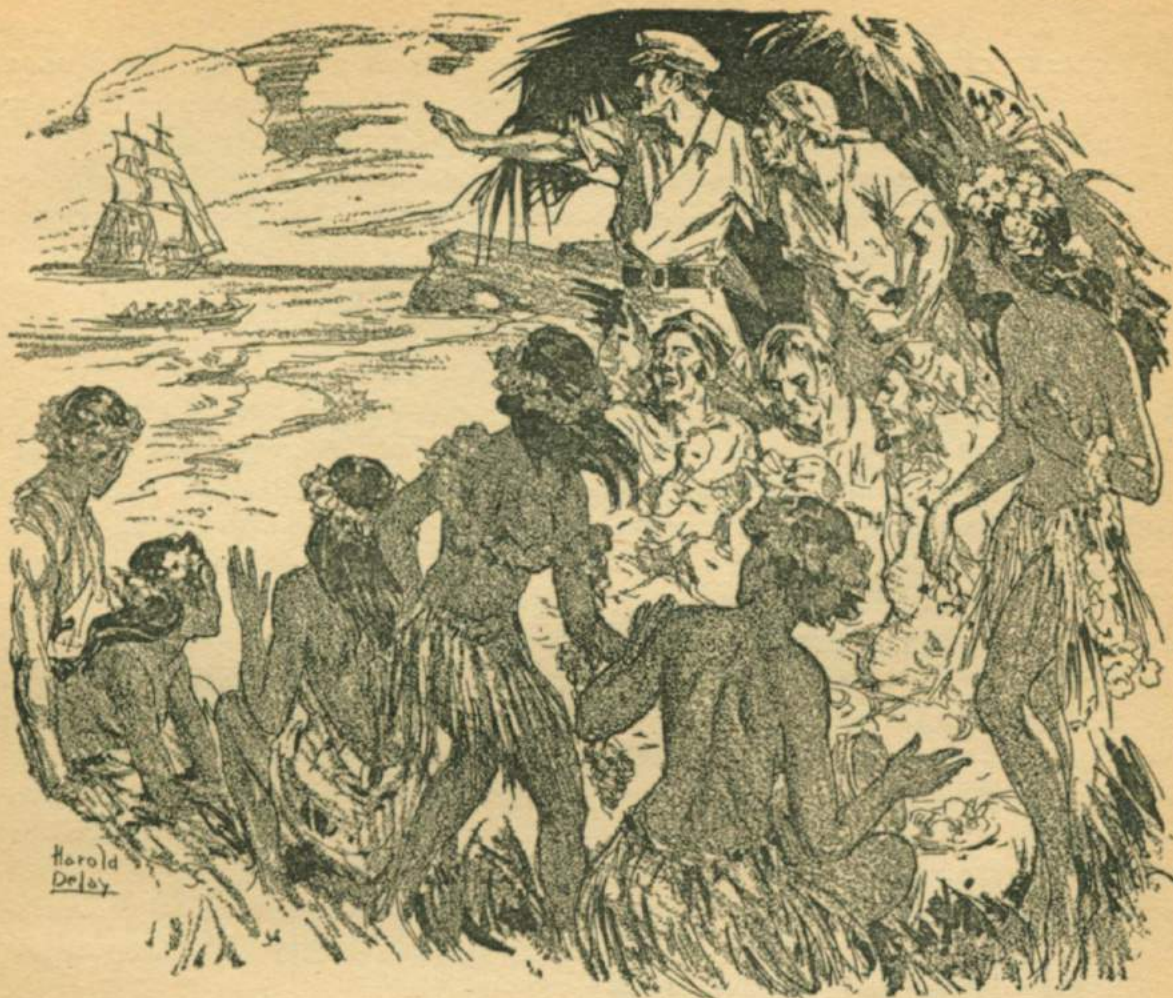
Amos Kenyon had not missed those jets of smoke from the *Petrel*. Grimly he waited for his boats before setting out for the island. The *Petrel* had scored again.

THE welcome as Chase swung into the harbor was such as he had always known. The gay young girls swarmed about them as they went through the gap in the reef, their naked young bodies sliding through the waves with graceful strokes as their happy voices greeted both brown and white friends in the crew.

But there was a different story half an hour later when Chief Leli, recovered now from his illness, but stooped of shoulder, and blinded in one eye, came aboard in regal dignity to hear the story of what had happened to his subjects who had been seized by the master of the *Albatross*.

Chase did his best to explain, telling Leli of the two schools of thought regarding the treatment of crews and natives. Then he explained about the race, and reiterated that the winner could dictate company policy in the future.

Old Leli listened attentively, with his good eye blinking back the tears at the prospect of what the future held



"Then the feast was rudely interrupted."

for his people unless Chase won.

Then Chase came to the point. "My scratching of the arm has saved your people. Not one of those I scratched has been sick, although many who would not take my magic are now dead. This, together with the kindness I have shown your people, is enough to prove I am your friend. I bring you further proof of that. These two rifles are yours, that you might keep the other captains from seizing your people. Some of your men who have been away on the ships before can use them."

The old chief was fluent with his thanks, grateful of this contribution to the almost hopeless battle he and

his people were fighting.

"Now, I hope that my friendship is so established that Leli will see fit to aid me in return."

Chase stopped, and swallowed to cover his nervous anticipation.

"Long ago a whaling master stopped at this island and learned where the sperm whales go when they leave here. No other white man knew. That man has died. If I knew that track of the whales I could catch more than Captain Kenyon, fill before him, and beat him home. Then our owner would know that my way of treating you and your people is best."

He saw that scowl on Leli's face and his own heart sank. He felt that his

only chance of besting Amos Kenyon in the race for oil lay in knowing where the great whale herd disappeared to during those two or three months when the other ships could not find them.

"The white brother has spoken wisely," said Leli sadly, "when he has said that he has proved himself the friend of my people. I know too that he is the enemy of this man who hunts in a ship like his. But the heart of Leli is sad. Leli can not tell you what you want.

"The way of the whales is not known to us. Years ago another tribe, called the Whale people, came here at times from distant islands to meet the whales. We never knew where their home was. But they have not come for years now. I only know that they came from the south in swift sailing canoes, and returned to the southward in them."

Burden Chase had listened with searching eyes, probing that pocked old face for the truth. Could the old man be lying, trying to preserve a secret his people had known? Was Kenyon right in his claim that one must treat these natives with cruelty to get the most out of them?

He glowered fiercely seaward, where the *Albatross* was working in against a soft off-shore breeze. If Kenyon had believed in the whale way, Chase knew that he would not have hesitated to torture the old chief to come at the secret. Perhaps it was the wise thing to do.

While he hesitated, the islanders brought him gifts to show their appreciation of his kindness. Roast pigs were offered up in a banquet for his entire crew. Fruits galore were heaped on the decks.

Not a man aboard but received a gift of some kind from the native who adopted him as brother and followed him about like a dog. Old Leli, the tears still streaming from his eye, presented Chase with two lustrous pearls of matchless beauty that his people had found in their fishing and he had treasured as royal gems.

But no information of the whale track was forthcoming and Chase was reluctantly forced to admit to himself that the old man knew nothing of it.

Then the feast was rudely interrupted by the sharp bark of rifles from the becalmed *Albatross*.

Captain Chase leaped to his feet and stared seaward. A boat, loaded to the gunnels with laboring men, was pulling in through the reef, while rifles were barking from the slightly rolling ship.

Instantly he jumped to the conclusion that the angry Kenyon was attacking.

"Back to the ship," he roared to his men. "It looks as if we've got to fight."

Down they rushed, tumbling into beached boats, splashing madly off to clamber up the bluff sides of the bark. But the oncoming boat veered away just inside the reef and went sliding ashore under the shadow of some overhanging cocoanut palms.

Captain Chase scratched his head. Then he turned grimly to Trueman.

"Keep everybody aboard," he said in a low voice. "Issue arms. Double the anchor watch and let all others get as much sleep and rest as they can. This looks like a flank attack to me. I'm going ashore to warn Leli. There's no knowing what treachery Kenyon is up to now, but we've got to be on the alert for anything."

HE went swiftly back to the shore in his whale boat, each man of his crew carrying a pistol or rifle beside him in readiness to repel a rush from that landing party from the other ship. Thankful that the natives were in their harbor homes, he went quickly to the old chief.

Hargi had been dispatched with one of the rifles to the point to intercept the landing party and demand their intentions. He returned, grinning broadly, to gasp out a relieved message.

The boat had contained the remaining native fishermen that Kenyon had shanghaied, together with four whites who were weary of the abuse they had received. Sent to tow the *Albatross* to harbor, they had thrown the officer in charge overboard, unshipped the cable, and made for shore, with Kenyon shooting in a vain attempt to bring them back. One of the native boys had been wounded in the upper arm by a bullet and one of the four whites had been killed.

Chase was skeptical at first, still thinking it a trick. But when Hargi assured him that the renegades carried no arms, he began to realize that the poor devils had fled in an effort to escape further abuse.

Seeing another boat warping the *Albatross* in through the surf, he went back aboard his bark, after repeating his warning to Leli to be watchful of the three whites and to send them to safe hiding in the interior.

Barely had he stepped to the deck than he heard the anchor chain rattling out from his rival's bow, and saw Kenyon taking his place in the stern of the boat, which had swung back to the ship after towing inside the reef.

"Cap'n Chase," he called, his men idling on their oars near the *Petrel*.

"I'm willin' to bury the hatchet, if you are. We're gettin' nowhere fightin' each other."

"Suits me. Want to come aboard and talk it over?"

"Yes, and I want your help in rounding up them deserters."

Chase waited until his rival was looking at him over a glass of rum before he answered. Then he returned that questioning stare with defiance.

"Cap'n Kenyon," he said softly, "you're gettin' just what I knew was comin' to you. I warned you to treat your men as they should be treated."

Kenyon's face purpled under the rush of angry blood.

"Well," he snarled, "I didn't come here for a lecture. Do you help round up my men, or don't you?"

"Naturally, I don't. I'm not going to be an accessory to further murder hatching."

"Why, you sanctimonious hypocrite," bellowed Kenyon. "A lot you care about the stinkin' niggers and their rights! You're refusin' to help me so I'll be short handed and you can fill quicker'n I can. You can't pull the wool over my eyes, if you can over the old chief's."

Chase answered with silence. Kenyon's great fist plumped down on the table.

"But you'll not beat me, Mister Smarty, with all your native-lovin'. Them whales are gone for a couple of months, if that fool theory of Wing's is right. Well, my hearty, before them two months are up I'll be off New Zealand with a full crew, and you can bet on that. Let the fools desert if they want to. I'll leave 'em here to the cannibals on the other side of the island. We'll have their lays to split among the rest of us. If any of 'em survive,

they'll be crawlin' down and beggin' to be taken aboard by the time I'm back next year."

"I'm warning you," said Chase. "The natives are armed with rifles and will shoot to kill to prevent further shanghaiing of the islanders."

"Wait until I tell Gideon Wing how you help out a fellow skipper of his line," yelled Kenyon.

"Or until I tell him how you ironed a whale after I was fast and then deliberately sailed into one we were approaching and scared him away before the boats could dart."

"And how you deliberately fired with a rifle to scare one from under our noses when you couldn't do the same."

"Gentlemen," interposed Trueman, "wouldn't it be wiser to postpone your squabbles until you're back in Bedford?"

Kenyon laughed harshly. "A good idea that, Chase. And don't forget that the first man in gets Wing's ear. Thank God, Gideon Wing uses an honest dollar standard by which to judge success. He won't care a snap of his old fingers how right you are nor how wrong I be. The new ship and the command of the fleet goes to whoever is in first with full casks. You don't have to make two guesses to know that's me, even if you have tried to back my deserters and stir up trouble for me. I'll beat you if I have to flay the flesh off the backbones of every man aboard my ship and kill half the island niggers into the bargain."

He stamped angrily on deck, went back to his ship, and had his men heave up the anchor. Without waiting to take fresh water or fruit, he went lurching southward through the early morning grey.

Captain Chase followed soon afterward, after refusing to take the deserters from the *Albatross* with him.

"I'll stop and pick you up on the run home," he promised them, "but I can't manage it now without getting myself into more trouble with the owner. I've score enough to settle as it is when Kenyon gets home. Unless I can beat him to Bedford, I'm afraid my days in Wing vessels are over when I dock at the end of this trip."

THE next two months found the *Petrel* cruising needlessly among the islands to the southward. Twice they sighted the *Albatross* on the horizon, but each time Chase set a new course when her rigging bore testimony to her identity.

Then the whales appeared around them again and they renewed their grim chase. Fortune seemed to smile after continued adversity. They killed far more than the customary percentage that they found, rarely failing to sink iron once they lowered, and rarely drawing or being forced to cut, once they were fast.

Everything went smoothly aboard too. The men labored like beavers.

On they swept through the long months, skirting Antarctic ice, sweeping slowly up the forbidding coast of South America, stopping at Galapagos for mail. Then on again toward the Bering Sea.

It was a happy Captain Chase who led them northward from the barren little island where they had touched for mail. There, under the huge shell that served as a post office, he had found a letter from Priscilla Wing that made him more determined than ever to win the race. In it she had overcome her last maidenly reserve and

poured out her earnest supplications for him to beat Amos Kenyon home.

They cut in blubber in the frigid waters of the Aleutians, took more off Japan. Men worked until it seemed that human flesh could endure no more. They labored like mad at the oars to approach fleeing whales or to tow dead monsters back to the ship. They drove night and day to cut up their catch in record time, convert it into oil.

Song leaped to their lips. The promise of a rich lay and a quick run home was already sagging on the invisible tow-rope that led far back across the heaving miles to New Bedford.

Back toward Tali Mahi they swashed and pitched. Heavier in the water now, their faces even darker with an ever increasing tan, they looked almost like blood brothers of the cheerful island boys.

It became evident to them all that an unusually good catch near the end of that long trek might send them home before the lay-off that the disappearance of the whales would necessitate. In their enthusiasm and good fortune in meeting whales, they had nearly filled in record time.

Confident that they had long ago passed the lead that the *Albatross* had obtained by her early start, they wallowed toward the island.

Then their hearts sank. Riding still deeper in the gentle sea, the *Albatross*, her bottom fouled with weed from her stay in salt waters, her canvas showing the result of exposure to wind and sun and rain, heaved slowly into view for the first time in that long sweep they had made around the mighty ocean.

"One more whale of any size and I'll fill," called Kenyon exultantly. "And I'll manage that any day now. Sorry you won't be home in time to dance at

my weddin'. I've made it in record time, and Wing'll be proud of me. You ain't doin' so bad yourself," patronizingly.

"I need only three more good ones," called Chase. "With luck I'll beat you yet."

Kenyon's only answer was a scornful laugh. For whales were growing scarce and skittish. Over-hunting during the last few weeks had made them wary. They slid away at the approach of a boat, seemed aware of their danger at the hands of pursuers.

BOTH ships stopped at Tali Mahi for water and fruit. Leli allowed Kenyon's men to go ashore and gather what they wanted, but would not allow any of his people to come in contact with them. On the other hand he heaped the *Petrel* with gifts again and once more proclaimed his sorrow at being unable to give any inkling of the whale track.

Then the appearance of a single whale off shore sent them all scampering to sea in pursuit. As they were clearing the harbor, Chase was slightly behind the hurrying *Albatross*. Suddenly he saw a canoe putting out from the point, the occupants frantically waving as native paddlers dug madly.

He saw Kenyon jeeringly wave them toward the following ship and grimly determined not to delay to pick them up. Then Chase saw their faces and thought of their families waiting in vain for them back home. Hating himself for giving in, he luffed up and took the poor wretches aboard, to renew the pursuit of the whale and the *Albatross*, both sliding southward.

The whale loitered and the leading ship put out her boats. Chase's heart sank. That whale would certainly fill

the few remaining casks aboard the rival ship. He was licked if Kenyon killed that whale.

"Stand by and we'll leave you what we can't use," called his gloating rival, as the *Petrel* surged slowly past. "He'll more than fill us, and I can afford to be generous."

"Don't give anything away until you've caught it," snapped Chase.

On and on went the chase. Hour after hour the big whale kept evading those following boats.

Then he sounded at last, still heading southward.

Chase heaved a sigh of relief. Kenyon must stand by to pick up his boats. The *Petrel* was well in the lead. If that whale showed again he should get it.

The whale was not gone. The next morning the lookouts of both vessels sighted him lolling along ahead of them. But now he was joined by another huge monster, and Chase grew grim as he watched the pair cavorting southward. Their speed was slow enough to allow of capture with any luck. But the *Albatross* should be able to kill at least one of those two, and either one would suffice to fill those few empty casks.

On the other hand, even if Chase should manage to take both of them, he could scarcely hope to fill. It looked like a sure win for Kenyon unless the *Petrel* could frighten those monsters away before the other skipper could get one of them. Then the pair sounded once more.

Grimly determined to do his best, Chase waited for those twin jets of spray to announce that the whales were up again. His rifle was in his hands, ready to sting them into flight.

Suddenly the spyglass at Chase's side lifted to study that faint showing

just astern of the *Albatross*. His heart leaped with eagerness as he saw that wavering spray lift far off on the horizon and sink again after a mighty exhalation. He understood at once. Kenyon had overrun the whales in his eagerness to be in at the kill.

Hope ran high in the few minutes that followed as they slid swiftly eastward. Every man stood ready to tumble into the boats and set off in pursuit of what might prove to be enough oil to fill and send them home months before they could otherwise anticipate.

Then a sharp cry of disappointment rang across the sea as the eager watchers determined that this was no pair of whales, but an outrigger canoe with a hollowed log for hull and a smaller log for the buoyant outer float that was designed to prevent capsizing.

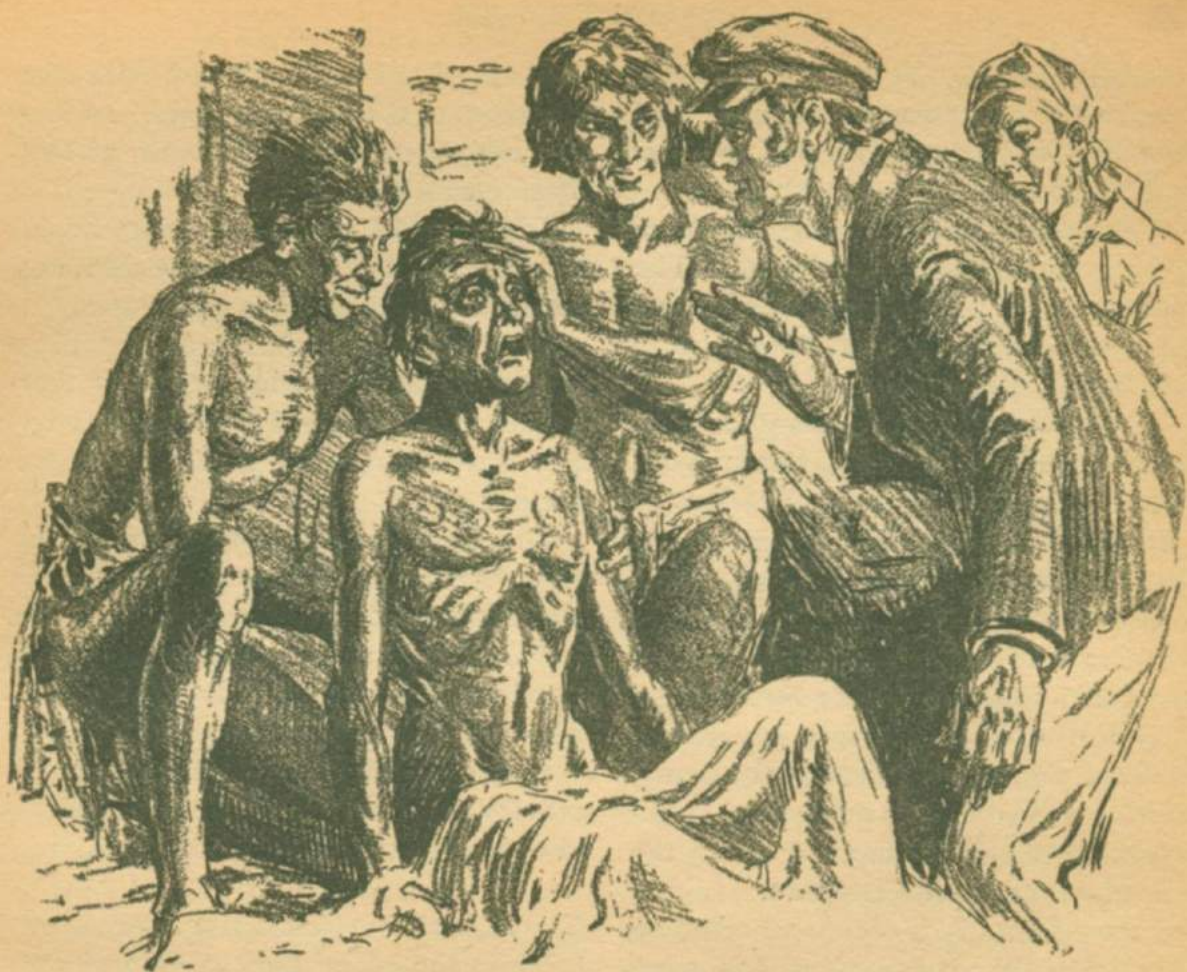
Cold with disappointment, Captain Chase gave the order to turn southward, where the *Albatross* was again in pursuit of the whales, once more visible. But that faint cry of disappointment had reached the canoe. A feeble frame, ghastly gaunt with emaciation, reared and flapped a feeble signal with a diaphanous bit of cloth.

Instantly they realized why they had been fooled. That waving cloth had been the despairing signal of the wretch to halt the unrelenting Kenyon, who had sped ruthlessly by, ignoring the oldest law of the sea by refusing aid to a signal of distress.

For five long minutes Chase held grimly to that southern course, ignoring the feeble wave and the frantic gesturing.

"We can put back and pick him up after we get the whales," he declared with finality.

Then he caught the helmsman's eye and his determination left him.



"Then he saw the shape of that bluish block of tattooing."

"Stand by to pick up the canoe," he called savagely.

THERE was but the one poor wretch alive, a ghastly skeleton among equally emaciated corpses. Too feeble to make a rope fast around his scrawny body, he had to be aided by an islander who knifed into the water readily enough and knotted the rope for him.

A mere chattering death's head with a mop of hair fallen over his eyes, with his blackened tongue protruding from cracked and swollen lips, he was carried forward by the pitying islanders and laid on a bag of hay from one of the bunks.

Then all attention except that of two islanders, who remained to dole water in mere drops to that parched mouth,

was centered on the distant *Albatross* and an effort to overtake her.

With hope alternately ebbing and flowing, they held southward all that day.

Then, just at nightfall, the whales slowed and the iron was darted by two of the pursuing *Albatross* boats before the *Petrel* could come close enough to lower.

"After 'em," called Chase, his face grim. "Try to maneuver to get between boat and whale, so they'll have to cut to keep from crashin' into us. We've got to stop 'em somehow, or they'll beat us to Bedford. We can claim it was an accident and they fouled us."

The whale was towing eastward across their bows and the maneuver

seemed feasible. They slid forward, even as the boats started skipping and pounding off in mad pursuit as their lines tightened.

A sudden squall sent the old bark surging forward with a rush. The whale veered, as if to help. The two boats tore madly at the looming hull that barred their way.

"Out of our course," screamed desperate mates. "Seaway, damn you! You'll make us cut!"

It was all over in a bare minute, once they had crossed that towline. The leading boat, bearing straight at them, came so close that smashing contact was inevitable unless the line parted. A glowering face suddenly lowered at the bow, and steel flashed at the hemp. In another instant the mad speed slackened and the boat sheered along the side of the bark with her thin planking unharmed but her occupants cursing fluently as they rode out the following wave and veered astern.

But the other boatsteerer had seen the fate of his comrades and thrown his full weight on the steering oar. The tiny cockleshell veered madly off at a wide angle, one gunnel dipping deep, the other lifting high, and it looked like a certain spill. Then the danger was passed, the boat shot clear of the *Petrel's* stern, righted, and sped on in tow of the whale, while a cry of exultant defiance wafted back to the discouraged Chase.

When the other bark came down in pursuit of the towing boat and delayed to pick up the one that had been forced to cut, Kenyon was grinning affably from his quarterdeck.

"You put up a fight anyhow, Cap'n Chase!" he called. "Now I can fill and be off. I'll tell Wing that you tried—but lost to a better man."

Chase lifted a face lined with the struggles of the last two years. Anxieties had aged him. He knew at last that he was beaten.

"Tell him I'll admit one thing, Cap'n Kenyon. You filled before me. It looks now as if you'd sure beat me home."

Late that night the flares of trying out on the horizon convinced him that he had lost. There was nothing to do now but loiter about until the whales reappeared.

Then a faint hope sprang up within him. Perhaps, if he careened at Tali Mahi and headed westward across the Indian Ocean and around the Cape of Good Hope, he might find a stray sperm whale or two there or in the Atlantic.

It was a futile hope, he knew, yet he grasped at it. Instantly he gave orders to come about and head for the island.

STILL all but despairing, they drew into the island harbor. Hargi and Leli conferred about helping unship the cargo, beaching the ship, and careening her to scrape her fouled bottom to insure a faster passage home.

"No need," grunted Hargi. "Take too long."

"But I'll more than make up the time by faster sailin'," pleaded Chase.

"We do another way," Hargi assured him. "Haul ship into river. Fresh water kill salt water life. Then we dive and scrape. You see. Save many days."

But the joy over this shortening of the required time was outdone by a sudden shouting from the hut where the poor wretch they had saved was lying. From the doorway burst the two boys Chase had assigned to care for him, their arms supporting the feeble frame, their hands pawing back the heavy tangle of hair from his forehead.

For a full minute the significance of their excited jabbering was lost on Chase. Then he saw the shape of that bluish block of tattooing on the high forehead that the lifted hair revealed. Running from temple to temple, plainly etched in the brown skin, was a clear outline of a sperm whale.

"A Whale Man!" cackled Hargi and Leli. "A Whale Man! One of those who know the whale track."

BURDEN CHASE was staring numbly. Suddenly the hearty smash of Abel Trueman's hand on his back startled him.

"There's hope yet, Cap'n Chase," he was bellowing. "Thar's still hope of fillin', in time to beat Kenyon home, if this poor devil knows where the whales go and'll tell us. Kenyon won't push hard for home, thinkin' we're hopelessly licked. If we crack on, we have a chance yet."

The enthusiasm spread to everybody in getting the *Petrel* ready for sea. While divers went under her hull to scrape off the dead growth, eager hands set up slack stays and ran aloft fresh canvas. Laughing natives helped in a frantic restoring of the great casks, already filled, and in piling generous supplies of firewood and provisions aboard.

Meanwhile the Whale Man was nursed carefully back to health. He readily consented to repay the white captain for saving his life by showing him the whale track and was carefully bundled aboard when the ship was finally ready.

Instead of heading southward, the feeble Whale Man insisted that they should stand due west. He explained laboriously through an interpreter that a cold current set in far south of Tali Mahi and ran west for fully a thousand

miles. The cruising whales, striking this cool water after lazing in the tropic warmth, were invigorated. They dashed madly westward, far from where the ships search to the south, to find shelter in a group of islands as yet unvisited by whaling ships, except Captain Avery's. Unpursued there, they loitered for some two months before going on to New Zealand waters.

The *Petrel* confirmed the statement a few days later, after bowling along under a steady strong wind. They had barely sighted the first of the string of islands when they saw rising spouts of many whales on the horizon.

Again the boats were lowered. Whales were struck and killed. Once more lights flared and the kettles boiled.

The relatives and friends of the guide came paddling off in their canoes to aid willingly in the cutting in and trying out and stowing down. In record time the casks were filled and stowed. Then the bark headed off toward the distant Cape of Good Hope across the Indian Ocean.

Chase and his men gloried as they left the Tali Mahi men at the islands to go back by canoe with the whale men. In the sight of scores on scores of sperm whales they saw that ten thousand dollar bonus and many a rich trip in the years to come. Then they bent to the grim race home.

MANNED with more hands than they needed to work ship, they had plenty of time to speculate about their chances. Many felt that the skipper had made a mistake in heading for Good Hope instead of the Horn, but others contended that on this route they would have the advantage of racing Kenyon without his knowledge that he

was still in a race. He might loiter for days at the various islands, frittering away time that he would otherwise spend in driving men and ship.

Furthermore, although they little suspected it, Burden Chase, young as he was, already knew the Atlantic like his own Westport backyard. At Good Hope he would find, at this time of the year, not only favorable winds but also favorable currents. With them to sweep him up the western coast of Africa and shove him far westward across the Atlantic, he could take advantage of trade winds to hit the Gulf Stream via the old slaving track to the Indies, and slide up past Hatteras to New Bedford!

Slow as she was, the old ship slogged steadily forward. If the *Albatross* had dallied at all, or had run into head winds, they might still have a chance to beat her home.

Hope grew from a tiny tendril to a mighty root of conviction. Complete success they felt sure, was theirs.

They made junction with the Gulf Stream off the end of Florida, and excitement ran high as the patched sails of another whaler, heading up from the southward to catch the current, were recognized as belonging to their rival, miles behind and hull down on the horizon.

But the elation was short lived. A hurricane, heading up from the West Indies, struck with terrific force. Chase saw the orange sky and knew by all signs what was coming, but he carried sail too long in his eagerness to hold his lead. A roaring gust of wind struck them a warning blow to drive them deep. They came up from that and men went racing to strip the canvas from her as captain and mates bawled. But they had waited too long. Before

the men could get aloft a second gust struck her with a terrific impact and turnbuckles ripped loose, masts splintered, and canvas billowed and flapped, while ropes twisted and flayed about like excited snakes.

Their decks cluttered, their canvas blown overboard, their masts standing bare or toppled over the side to threaten to smash a hole in the hull unless cut away, they lay at the mercy of that hurricane. Sea after sea pooped them. Men had to hang on for dear life while they were submerged, to hack with ready axes at the wreckage during those few minutes when her decks were clear. Mountainous seas rode on the tail of that great gust of wind, threatening to drive them under and batter them in a hopeless roll.

Bitter as the dismasting was to take, what followed was far worse. Out of the blackness and fury of the storm there came a blinding flash of lightning. Clearly illumined in its glare was the bare poled *Albatross* scudding rapidly homeward past them in the gloom, driven by the force of the wind on her bare masts and yards. For the second time in the epic race Amos Kenyon's caution had beaten Chase's daring.

Once more they knew that they had lost, as the storm dropped almost as quickly as it had risen.

They rerigged the ship with the last of their spare gear. Deep in the water, their pumps going to offset the leaks that the hurricane had developed, they fought grimly homeward, all of their elation turned to bitterness. Not a man aboard but would have given anything he ever hoped to own to beat the rival home.

Burden Chase was like a dazed man, and the monotonous days that followed found him staring, staring across those

intervening miles that stretched between him and the woman he had failed.

Montauk light did not cheer him. Seaconnet Point off the port bow meant nothing. All that he could see was the vision of that bare poled bark driving past him, and a companion picture of the grinning Kenyon escorting Priscilla Wing to the altar.

Suddenly Trueman let out a bellow that nearly tumbled the lookout from the crow's nest.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Chase testily, for he was in no humor for horse play.

"There's the *Albatross* standin' in from the sea. She's pitched her masts out of her and been rerigged, but it's the *Albatross* or I'll eat her, barnacles, bilge, and all. Look alive there, men, there's hope we'll win yet."

IT was true. The other bark had profited but little by stripping off her canvas. The storm had driven her far off shore, tossed her until stays snapped, and then left her to beat homeward under a jury rig. Now they were equidistant from New Bedford.

With a rising tide and a fair wind, they raced toward the home port. Both masters were licensed pilots and would not need to delay to pick one up. The *Petrel*, having used every spare yard of canvas for her jury rig, now blossomed with improvised studdingsails from the whaleboats. But the rival ship countered with similar equipment.

The in-running tide at Westport seized the *Petrel* and sucked her toward Horseneck Beach, where she might easily go aground. Sailors leaped into the rigging with more oars. Now their own blankets began to blossom at every inch where a vagrant spill of

wind threatened. They drew rapidly along the white beach, free at last from that tide rip.

But the drag of the tide had carried them so near the beach that the scrubby little island known as Gooseberry Neck lay straight ahead. In order to



"The bare poled *Albatross* scudding rapidly homeward."

round that they must wear ship, losing headway and precious time.

Captain Chase stared grimly at the breakers between the island and the shore. He had often negotiated that channel in a whaleboat during his boyhood and knew just how deep it was.

Men leaped to stations. Trueman began to think he had gone daft, for the skipper had the wheel in his powerful hands and was holding her headed for that riot of churning water between the little island and the mainland.

"Don't run us ashore," screamed Trueman.

Chase answered with a quiet smile. Straight into the welter of breaking waves he drove his ship with her cargo of oil and her anxious crew.

Men talked for years afterward of the nerve that took. Drawing within six inches of the depth of that short channel, the old bark might easily deviate three or four fathoms and hang up to end her days on a submerged rock or settling deeper and deeper in clinging sand from which she could never be saved. Scarcely two hundred yards long, the breachway was a treacherous stretch with danger lurking every foot of the way.

"We'll win or wreck her," called Chase as a wave picked them up and hurled them forward as the treacherous wind died.

That loss of wind seemed certain to be fatal. The waves came snoring in through the gap from each end, to peak high in a nasty slap in the middle. Straight at that peak the old bark wallowed. It seemed certain that she must end her days there at the shallowest spot.

Then they struck with a sickening grate of yielding sand along the old keel. Had there been any wind at all as they ground to a halt that jury rig must have gone by the board with a fresh rending of stays and timber. As it was, she merely settled there as gently as a seagull landing in the harbor, her canvas still slack.

Then two big waves came charging through the breach to converge upon them. At the same time a squall of wind came rustling across the salt grass of the island.

The waves smacked against the old hull, lifted it, got ready to shove it toward the hungry beach. The squall hit the improvised sails just as the hull

came up from the sand.

Like a mad thing she leaped, going across the shallow and into the outracing sweep of water that fled eastward to meet the next wave. Luckily the wind held long enough to drive her bluff bow through three staggering combers in succession and to see her through the gap and into deep water beyond.

The Kenyon crew, lashed to a bitter tirade by their master, had done by order what the *Petrel* men had done voluntarily, and the other bark now blossomed with as indiscriminate an array of shoddy blankets, torn and patched and stained with salt water, as ever met mortal view!

With this addition, the Kenyon vessel came on fast. Burden Chase hugged points, sheered past rocks with barely the thickness of his paint between hull and granite, risked dragging her keel through soft harbor mud or over sandbars to shorten his distance.

On and on came the bigger appearing *Albatross*. Inch by inch she ate up the short half mile of lead that the daring Chase had acquired. Her bowsprit was abreast of the *Petrel's* poop and the two captains were glaring at each other with glances freighted with bitter hatred.

Gideon Wing, after the custom of whaling ship owners, had been informed by courier when the two ships were sighted off shore. With his pretty daughter along to watch the outcome, her face alternately red and white with the excitement, he was pacing his wharf as they came creeping closer on the dying wind.

The bluff bow of the pursuing craft had gone forward of the leader's beam. Inch by bitter inch it crept up and up and up until, just abreast of the Wing

wharf, it looked as if the *Albatross*, coming up on the *Petrel's* port, had outmaneuvered Chase and would beat him to the wharf by blocking his way.

Seeing this, Chase grimly started to edge his rival shoreward with a daring maneuver that threatened to send him smashing against the heavy spiles, while the outer bark slipped past and into the dock beyond.

But Gideon Wing was dancing about excitedly and waving his gold headed cane. At first neither of the arriving skippers could distinguish what he tried to show by gesticulations, for the crowd that had come down to see the end of the race was roaring and drowning his words.

Then they both saw at once. The schooner at the end of the wharf prevented their docking there, and the big new hull of the promised flagship of the fleet lay in the slip beyond, blocking entrance to either of them.

Then the roaring of the crowd ceased and they heard Wing's shrill old treble, "Heave to and anchor! There ain't room to dock."

Instantly both headed up into the wind. Reckless, both screamed to let go anchors. Like twin swans rising on the water, the two ships lay, sails flapping, hulls idly rocking in the harbor wash.

But that was all that was idle aboard either of them.

"Get my gig over," howled Kenyon above the bellowed orders of his mate. "Snake the rags off her, the rest of you."

But there was no roaring of orders aboard the *Petrel*. Everybody seemed to know and to anticipate what was to be done. Men accustomed to dropping boats in a hurry outdid themselves. Skipper and rowers were striking the

water before the bark had ceased her first swing at the anchor chain.

Kenyon's boat struck at about the same instant and both crews pulled like mad. Although Chase had lain a few fathoms farther off, his men made up the difference in the strength of their pull as they fairly lifted the boat from the water, while Kenyon cursed madly.

Both boats smacked against the spiles without slowing. Simultaneously they spewed their captains over the caplog to the very feet of the dancing Wing. Both men reached out their right hands together to claim the honor of the first shake.

GIDEON WING chuckled and danced about before them, both of his arms behind his back, his set of solid gold false teeth threatening to jump out on the wharf. His twinkling little eyes surveyed ships, boats, and masters with great delight.

"Who won, Priscy?" he asked, bobbing his head toward her. "Come, come, lass, who's winner here?"

Before she could answer, the crews of both ships roared with a mighty bellow, "Cap'n Chase won! Give the prize to Cap'n Chase."

A happy blush spread over the girl's white neck and throat. Her eyes suddenly danced like stars. Her lips drew back in a flashing smile.

"The men seem to have answered for me," she said happily.

"Never trust the word of forecas'le hands," sniffed Wing, his old head shaking. "Now, what do you say, men? It's a dead heat, I'd call it. Suppose we settle it by measurement? The ship with the most ile aboard is winner. Will that do?"

Amos Kenyon had listened with a mounting anger to the roars of the men

and the words of the girl. Hulking large in his wrath beside the smaller Chase, he suddenly cast all caution to the wind in his blind fury.

"I'll fight him for it, man to man," he snarled. "There's been a deal of bad blood between the nigger-lovin' idiot and me from start to finish."

"It suits me," snapped Chase. "It'll take a lot more courage to stand up to me than it did to murder natives. I'll fight you and be glad to, winner take all. And loser to knuckle."

"Suits me," grinned Wing, nodding delightedly. "A cap'n's got to be able to fight to be worth his salt."

Chase held up a hand. The crowd ceased its excited jabbering.

"There's one thing I'm asking you to promise, Mister Wing. If I win, you'll let me determine company policy in the handling of crews and recruiting of native helpers."

Wing looked at him a long minute, pinching his loose lower lip speculatively.

"Give it to him," roared somebody on the *Petrel*. "The best skipper that ever captained a whaler."

"Do, father," urged Miss Priscilla, her color gone again.

"You can safely promise," grinned Kenyon, stripping off his shirt to bare his great shoulders. "He isn't winning."

"It's agreed," nodded Wing.

"I ought to warn you, Amos," said Chase softly, "that I took lessons in boxing from an Englishman aboard my father's ship."

"All the boxing you need to worry about will be done by an undertaker," was his answer.

"Harvey Grinn'll, you c'n see there's fair play," called Wing, singling out the biggest man at hand.

The giant Grinnell nodded to the two contestants.

"First man to call quits or fail to rise off both knees after the count of ten from the instant he touches the wharf will be declared loser. Ready, men? Go!"

HE STEPPED between them with a surprising agility. Then the two stood surveying each other for a full half minute, Chase poised and seemingly half indifferent, Kenyon hulking and lowering, his forehead down in a scowl.

All about them, climbed on the piled casks, standing in rows about the improvised ring, craning, the crowd waited, breathless with expectancy.

At least Kenyon was circling. Chase stood half crouched, his body still limp, his manner almost listless.

Not one of those watchers knew enough about the art of self defense as it was already practised in sport-loving England to sense that the listlessness was complete relaxation. While Kenyon circled, his huge muscles tensed, he was needlessly using up precious energy, forcing his heart and lungs to extra exertion to carry off the poisons of spent energy.

Suddenly Kenyon leaped. But those half lidded, downcast eyes had caught the preliminary stiffening of the ankle for the lunge. That limp body seemed to slump aside and one of those hanging arms suddenly lashed out like a sail snapped in a gale. But there was nothing of the sail's softness in the crack of those hard knuckles against Kenyon's jaw. The charging man went down with a crash, landing in a jarring sitting position on the oil soaked wharf.

"I'll get you for that," he gritted, instantly bounding to his feet and boring in with another mad rush.



"There was nothing of the sail's softness to the crack of those hard knuckles against Kenyon's jaw."

Again that lackadaisical body was miraculously able to glide to safety just out of reach of the balled fist that might have scored a knockdown. Again an arm snapped out quickly. This time it was an open hand at the end that chopped with the stiff edge of the heel across the Adam's apple of the attacker, snapping his head back and almost knocking him down again.

Gasping and coughing, Kenyon halted his rushing tactics and began his circling again.

"Whyn't you fight?" jeered a watcher. "Swap some punches like men."

"He won't. He's running away," complained Kenyon, seeking to gain the sympathy of the crowd.

"He on'y seems to be," cackled a toothless old fellow who seemed to be enjoying proceedings immensely. "He's already knocked you back so far you're tired out walkin' to him. Give it to him, Burdie. We're all with you."

The crowd took up the cry. As champion of abused seamen anybody was certain to be popular with all of that crowd!

But the calls of encouragement for Chase seemed to make Kenyon fiercer. He came in slowly, backing his smaller

opponent ruthlessly into a corner where filled casks barred his escape unless he went into those balled fists that blocked his way.

Suddenly the lithe Chase stepped forward and lashed out with the fury of a wild cat. Limp muscles jerked into sudden action. The slack body became a set of magic springs, coiling and uncoiling, flailing savagely, expertly.

Recovering his surprise only after a number of blows had almost dropped him, Kenyon bellowed again at this unwillingness of his opponent to slug with him on equal terms. His huge fists were buried in a rapid one-two in Chase's middle.

The smaller man buckled and went down, his grunt of lost wind echoed in the sudden stillness by a gasp from Miss Priscilla.

Kenyon was ready to leap upon him while he was down, but Harvey Grinnell seized him and hurled him back, beginning his slow count.

At five Burden Chase lifted an agonized face, his mouth open, his collapsed lungs gasping in vain for fresh air. At seven he seemed to suck in a little precious oxygen. At eight he caught the agonized glance of Priscilla Wing and knew that he must get to his feet or forever carry with him the memory of those eyes swimming with tears of entreaty.

Nine found him wheezing and half doubled up, but on his feet. The crowd roared with delight, Grinnell danced out of the way, and Kenyon rushed again.

Still too limp from the loss of wind either to fight or slip away, Chase could only lean against the bigger man in a feeble clinch that did not succeed

in taking all of the force out of those short jabs at the body but did lessen their smashing effect.

Then his wind was back and they were separated again. Once more they circled, Chase on the defensive, waiting in the center of the improvised ring, Kenyon going around and around like a lone wolf searching for a flaw in the defense of a winded buck.

Again he leaped. Again that limp body lanced out a savage fist. This time there was no ducking nor side-stepping. Chase had braced himself in advance, crouched, every joint in readiness. At an angle of forty-five degrees from his flexed ankle to his rigid head, he was suddenly ready to take that charge without flinching.

That right hand, lashing upward to meet the ducked head in a lifting sweep that modern boxing fans know as an uppercut, was backed with all the lifting drive of that crouched body and that bent forward leg. Ankle, knee, hip, and torso added their bit to the terrific swing of wrist, arm, and shoulder. The smash of impact, as bare knuckles cracked into yielding features, was like the sound of a heavy maul hitting true on a water soaked spile.

There was no question about counting as that huge body halted, straightened, wavered, and then crashed limply forward on the face on that oily plank. Neither was there any question about the favorite in that bellowing, maniacal mob that was still roaring its delight when a bucket of water, hastily scooped from the harbor, was doused over the prostrate figure.

"SORRY I had to do that to bring you to your senses," said Chase, offering Kenyon his hand. "But I'd

be proud to have you for a skipper in the Wing fleet, if you think you can stomach my policy."

Kenyon looked around groggily at the cheering mob. His eyes went to his own crew on the yards of his bark, still roaring their delight at his downfall. For an instant his face darkened. Then he shrugged and a slow grin spread over his mashed face.

"I guess you must be right, Burden," he said sheepishly. "You always have been—somehow. I thought this once I had you. I'd be proud to sail under you and try your way of handling men. I guess your system has mine licked."

The smile spread across his swelling features. His big hand still held Burden's, and his arm pumped.

"And, Burden, if the sawbones up ashore can patch me up so I'll look fit, I wouldn't mind bein' best man at your weddin', if you're so minded." Then, as Chase looked down into the brown eyes just below his shoulder, where the girl's head snuggled. "I reckon that's the only way I'll ever be best man, by God, with him around."

Then the crowd swarmed around them, cheering anew, seeking to con-

gratulate the happy couple, laughing, shouting, hilarious over the prospects of a big wedding and future prosperity for all concerned.

Then Burden Chase's thumb and forefinger dipped into his waistcoat pocket to bring out those twin pearls Leli had given him.

"My engagement present," he whispered into an ear that matched their delicate pink luster. "Just as soon as I can have them made into a pair of ear-rings for you. Then my share of the profits of the voyage and of the ten thousand we get for discovering the whales' way will build us a fine home in Dartmouth or Westport with a roof walk from which you can watch the sea."

"But not until we've decided to leave the sea, Burden," she smiled up at him, "for you're not leaving me behind. I'm off with you. Father is going to fit the *Condor* up so that I can go."

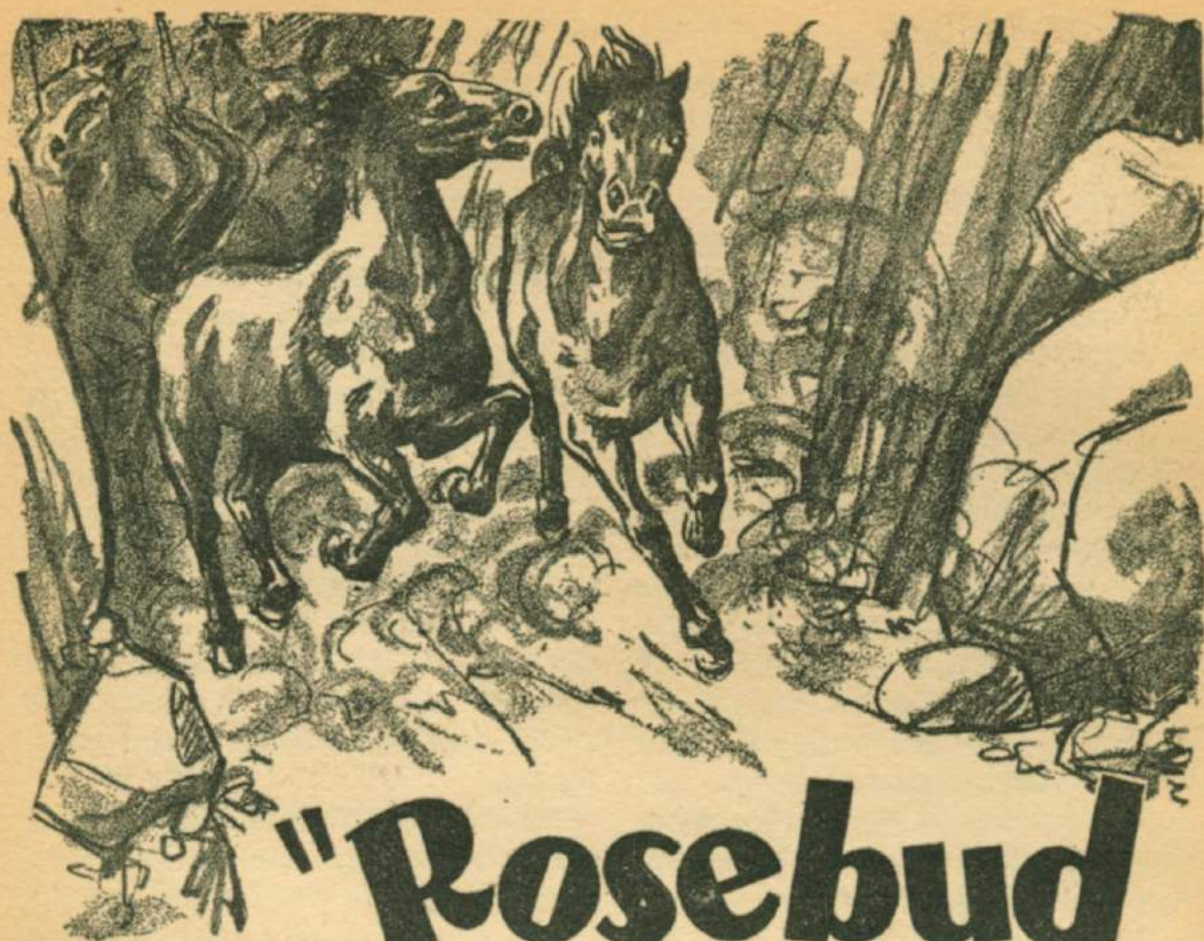
In their happiness they so far forgot themselves as to kiss, openly, in the very center of that milling mob, which was a nine-day wonder in conservative old New Bedford.

COMING NEXT MONTH

In the NOVEMBER issue of **GOLDEN FLEECE**, **Anthony Rud** will present his fascinating and unusual tale of the Australian Bush—Camel Patrols—Blackfellows—War Drums—Dancing Skeletons—The Scourge of Giant Rabbits—and **ACTION APLENTY**.

THE STORY OF

The Transcontinental Fence That Saved a Nation—A thrilling story that you can't afford to miss.



"Rosebud"

by ANTHONY M. RUD

Illustrated by JAMES CARR

"THE NORTHERN CHEY-
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Big Horns," said Big Jim Haskins,
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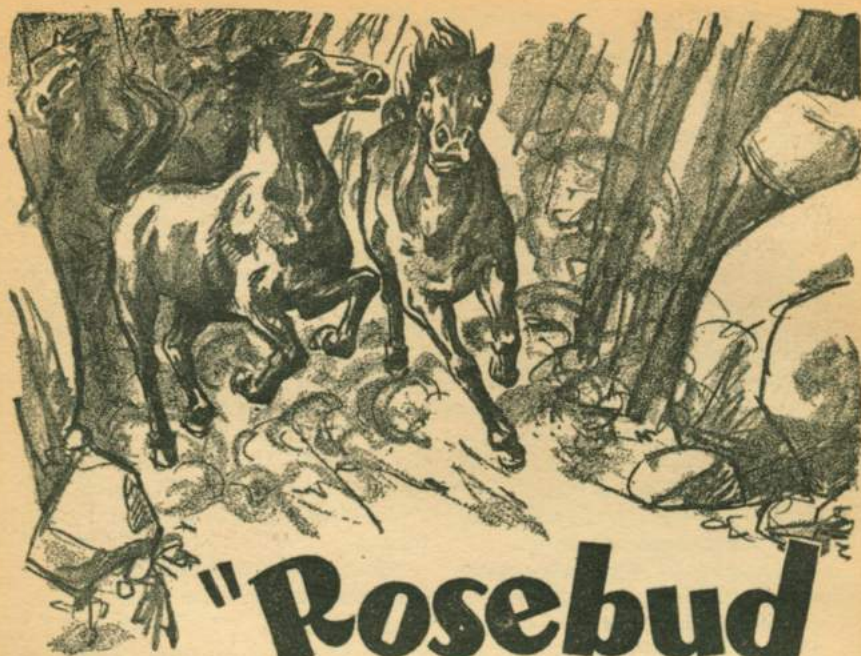
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V Up and V Down, grunted and held
out a calloused paw.

"Shake, kid," he boomed. "Yo're a
hoss wrangler now. W'atcher name,
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Rosebud Joe. Waal, yuh may fill out,
give yuh time, but right now yuh look
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barb? Sure yuh do."

"I've set hosses, snatchin' calves, but
I don't know one kind f'm t'other," said
the hollow eyed kid. "I kin learn,
though."

"Sure yuh can," boomed Sam Hardy,
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The V Up and V Down specialized in Morgans—and Indian trouble. The Northern Cheyennes and the Crows were supposed to be subdued and living happily on their reservations to the south. But now and then raiding bands of them came. Then there was some quick, grim work with Winchesters, or else a band of valuable horses vanished never to be seen again.

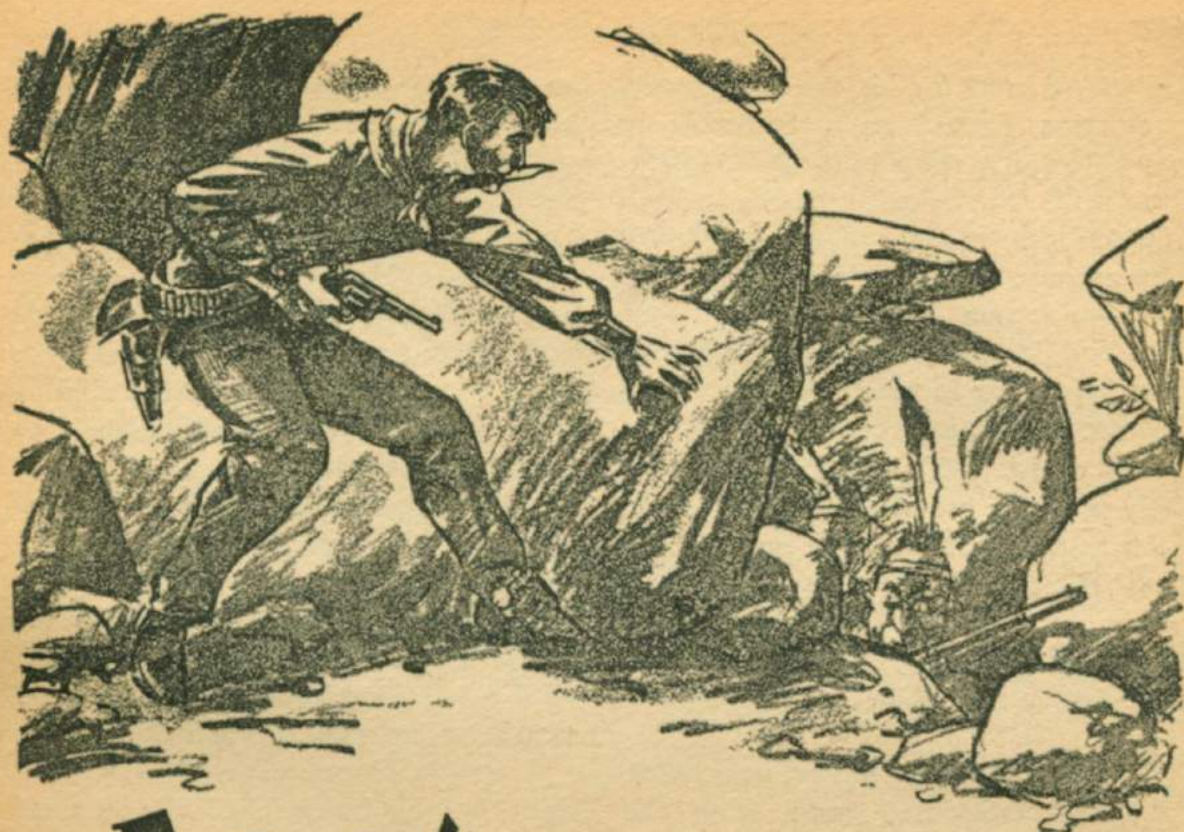
BESIDES this chronic trouble, there were a few white rustlers operating in Montana. And then there was Redbird.

Redbird was a four year old stallion, probably a cross of Morgan and Spanish barb. He was a reddish glistening chestnut in color, magnificent in his young strength and sleekness in summer; shaggy and hirsute in winter. He

ran a harem of thirty-odd mares, and was always trumpeting and snorting and luring more valuable brood mares away from the ranches.

Big Jim Haskins had a standing offer of a thousand dollars for Redbird alive, and one hundred for him dead. He was a menace, and cost more money than wolves. Just the same no waddy in Montana who ever had set eyes on him, coveted the hundred.

Rosebud Joe, as a button, fetched and carried, spread hay on the snow in winter, and often accompanied the foreman, Sam Hardy, when the latter thought he might need a messenger. The two of them were riding the breaks beyond Thunder Butte one June day, when with a snort, a squealing whinny and a thumping of hoofs the Redbird flew past them, mane and tail banner-



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ing as pennons for his troop of mares.

With a gasped oath, Sam Hardy went for the carbine in his saddle boot. But with a choked cry the button rammed the shoulder of his mount into Sam's pony, spoiling any chance to fire.

"I—kick me if yuh wanta," said Rosebud Joe then, dropping his brown eyes before the foreman's glare. "He—he's too damn purty to kill. He's—"

"All right, kid," chuckled Sam ruefully after a moment. "I'd give six months pay to lay a rope on him, my own self. Only—he costs the ranch plenty. Didja see them three brood mares close up at his heels? The boss paid plenty for them."

WITH the spring of that year, 1898, wild tales had come from the Klondike. Gold. Bonanza Creek. Candle. Gold lying in the black sand just a few feet underground. And three riders from the V Up and V Down left to try their luck in the northland. Others were restive, thinking how long they'd have to draw forty a month to have a stake, when they could pick up a fortune in a single summer if they were lucky hunting gold.

That was the first and mildest of the misfortunes which came to the horse range that year. Without saying much of anything, the United States Government combed the Indian reservations for choice saddle stock—and the Indians quietly let themselves out the back doors of the reservation bound for replenishments.

Brushes with the redskin rustlers became frequent. Rosebud Joe, now turned eighteen, was given a rifle and made ride night guard same as his elders. And the elders now were too few in number.

There came a night when more than

sixty fine Morgans were run off. Haskins, Hardy, and their two remaining seasoned men took the plain trail with Rosebud Joe trailing along.

The trail led southwest. It all happened so suddenly the button scarcely had a chance to know it was an ambush at all. From willows and jackpine came a sudden volley of black powder rifles—oldtime weapons, but deadly enough at eighty yard range.

With a choked scream Pete Yardley fell, and his horse galloped straight ahead into the group of redskin rustlers. Haskins, the ranchman, was badly hit in the thigh. Sam Hardy was cursing with a left foot from which a big toe was hanging with shreds of boot.

A waddy named Gleason, Poke for short, had his horse felled like an axed steer, with a .50-110 slug in his forehead. Poke wrenched a leg getting clear as the animal went down.

Rosebud Joe, making his horse lie down while he fired methodically at the moving branches—getting one whoop of pain to tell of a hit—was the only one unharmed.

The redskins fled with their stolen horses. The white men made a slow and painful way back to the ranch. Big Jim Haskins was suffering extreme agony, beads of sweat coming forth on his bronzed forehead.

"It's m' hip, boys," he said from between set teeth. "Get me a down mattress an' lay it in the spring wagon. I got to get me to Miles City an' have Doc Tindall set it in a cast. Busted hips are damn bad medicine."

He waited only until they buried Pete Yardley. Then Haskins got Poke Gleason to drive the spring wagon.

"I hate to leave yuh with a bum foot, Sam," Haskins told the foreman, holding out a hand. "But when yo're able,

gather up the stock an' sell it. The Government wants hosses now. There's some talk about a war with Spain, over that *Maine* sinkin'.

"Yuh know all about the bank, an' they know you. So long. It mebbe will be six months or more till I'm back, but I'm countin' on yuh, Sam Hardy."

"I'll be waitin', Jim," said the foreman, shaking hands.

"Would yuh—shake with me, too—Boss?" asked a youthful voice. Rosebud Joe was there beside the wagon, hat off. His face was red, but he was sort of wistful, too. Big Jim was just about the whole horizon and moon and stars to Joe in those days.

"You bet," said Big Jim, holding out his immense hand, and clasping the thinner but more calloused paw of the boy. "You stick with the old ranch, and with Sam, youngster. 'I'll make yuh a tophand when I come back!'"

WITH the Chinese cook, Rosebud Joe started then to run the big ranch. Fortunately it was summer. Also fortunately the horse herd was smaller than it had been for years. For misfortune continued to mount. Big Jim had promised to send out two or three hands to help Sam Hardy. The owner actually paid three men, bar loungers at Miles City, to go to the ranch. The three promptly took train for Seattle, hungry for a look at the land of gold far north. With their meager capital and more meager mental equipment, they probably got nowhere, but the ranch never heard of them.

And Sam Hardy was a sick man. Somehow his foot had developed an infection, in spite of the caustics applied to the stump of toe. The flesh of the foot swelled, turned red, then green and black.

Rosebud Joe swore softly in horror the first time he saw it without bandages, as Sam was soaking it in hot water.

"You gotta go to a doc, too, Sam!" breathed the button. "C'mon, I wouldn't waste no time. That looks bad. Yuh might lose a foot!"

"The ranch can't run itself," denied Sam Hardy doggedly.

But next morning his whole leg ached. He took a look at the foot, groaned, and gave up. Ride in with me, Joe," he asked. "I—I cain't stand this no longer. Yuh'll have to do best yuh can with the hosses. Drive in an' sell what yuh can get together. The rest 'll go to the Injuns, I guess."

When after that long and painful trip, during which the foreman began to talk wildly in fever delirium, Rosebud Joe found he would have to leave the foreman in the cottage hospital. Sam Hardy was sure to lose at least his foot. Maybe his whole leg—or his life. Shaken, grim faced, but resolutely facing a future which must have struck terror into even his soul of loyalty, Rosebud Joe rode back to the ranch which six months before had employed seven men and a cook, besides himself.

Now even the Chinaman had taken his departure. Rosebud Joe was alone, at the age of eighteen, upon a ranch which still represented an investment of more than fifty thousand dollars—twenty-five thousand of which was left in valuable brood mares and stallions.

Left, that is, if the Indians or Redbird had made no new depredations in his absence!

"I gotta do m' best—for Big Jim an' Sam," he said often aloud as he went about the manifold duties. That was his credo. From that time on he heard nothing at all from the two men. But

Joe knew he was not likely to see Sam again ever; and the big boss surely would be away three months or more. Something had to be done at once with the horse herd remnant, or it would vanish.

"I'll gather the poorer 'ns fust, an' sell 'em. Then the good ones. The broodies an' stallions last . . . iffen Big Jim ain't come by then . . ." he decided.

He had accompanied Sam Hardy once to the market at Fort Dickerson, where army buyers haggled and bought—and sometimes split prices with men who could be bribed. So Rosebud Joe knew about what the ordinary grade of Morgan saddlers should bring. Also he expected to have to bargain a long time when he offered animals for sale.

But almost unknown to this horse range, bugles were blowing. Great ships of the navy were plowing the deep, bound for Santiago and Manila Bay. Transports were carrying troops to Cuba. Rough Riders were gathering under the beloved Teddy. Down at Chickamauga twenty thousand soldiers were stricken with yellow jack. A war was on. . .

SO IT was that when two weeks later a saddle stained and tired looking waddy came into the Fort with thirty-three splendid, well-fed Morgans—the culls they were, at that—the army buyers fairly mobbed Rosebud Joe. They asked no questions, but demanded the horses. The rate they mentioned made the lad's brown eyes bulge. But he had a certain duty to Big Jim, he thought. He refused the first offer—and got one fifty percent higher.

He accepted that, took the paymaster's check, and went to the bank at Marysville. With complete candor he

went to the bank president and told his simple story; how this money belonged to Big Jim Haskins, and there would be more. How could he keep it safe for his boss?

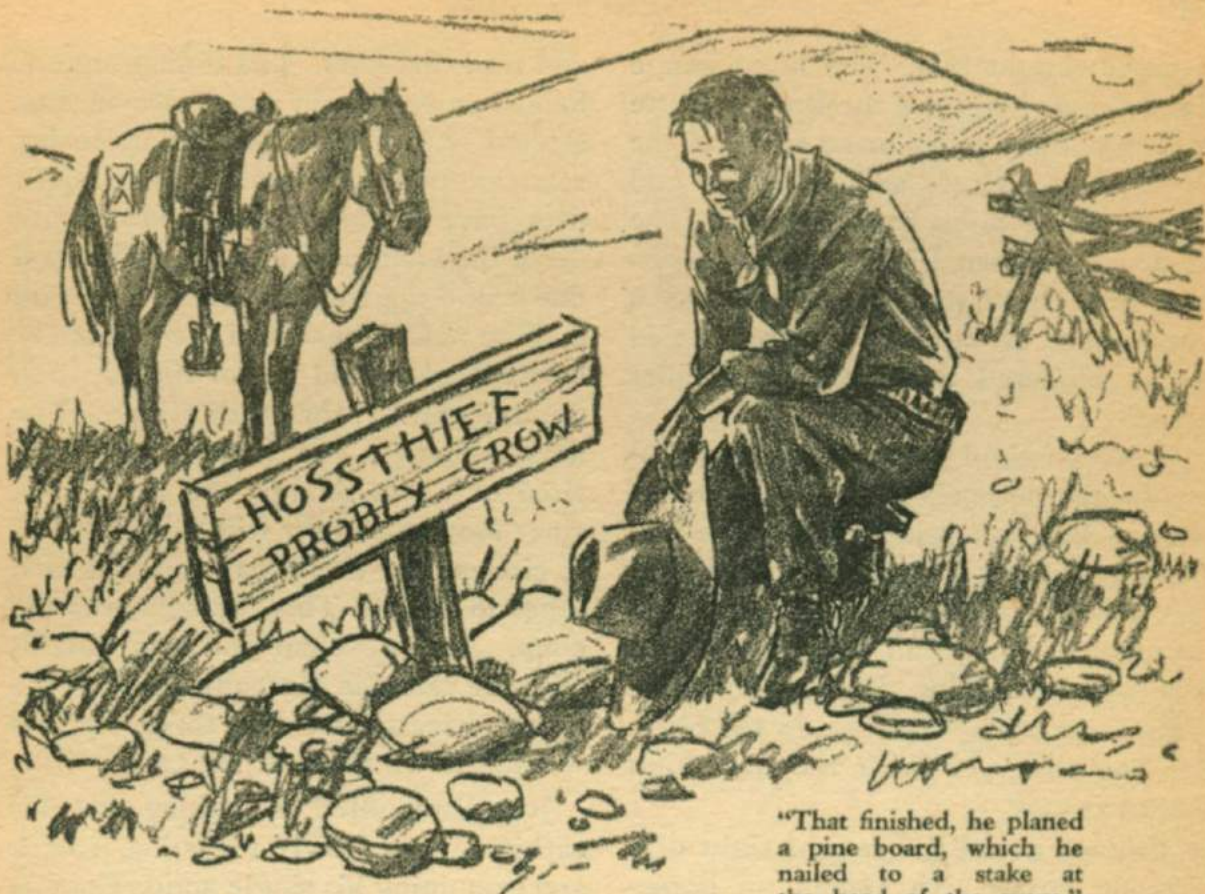
Matt Halleck was a straight shooter. As soon as he found out the kid was square, he helped. He fixed up the account in Big Jim's name, giving the boy a hundred dollars for grub, out of it. Then Matt sat down and wrote a dry sort of letter to Big Jim at the hospital in Miles City, enclosing the deposit slip and saying he thought Big Jim had considerable trust in humanity to load this responsibility on a kid's shoulders.

Big Jim cursed and squirmed in his cast. He managed to write a long letter of directions to Rosebud Joe and Sam Hardy, whom he supposed to be at the ranch. The letter never was delivered, for the simple reason that Rosebud Joe never had got a letter in his life, and did not think to go to a post-office and enquire for one now.

It was nearly a month later that the young waddy rode into the Fort with his next herd of horses. Then it was he learned of the death by blood poisoning, of Sam Hardy. There was nothing to do but set his jaw. Sam had been a friend. Now he was gone. Rosebud Joe sold the thirty-seven horses and went back for more.

One more trip was made in safety; and then there were just three extremely valuable stallions, and fifteen brood mares left. These stallions had to be hobbled; and even then, with their flaring nostrils blood red, their mating and fighting passions aroused, they would be extremely troublesome on the trail.

It took the kid five days to get them V-stalled, hobbled, and turned into the holding corral. Then Rosebud Joe



"That finished, he planed a pine board, which he nailed to a stake at the head of the grave."

forked in bluejoint hay, filled the water trough, and turned in for twelve hours sleep.

He didn't get it. Three hours after sundown there came squealing and snorting from the corral. Joe came running out in the moonlight with his rifle. He saw dark figures—Indians. He let go with a shot, ran to the corral, fired again, and again—and the marauders evidently thought they had the whole ranch after them. They dashed for their horses and escaped. Joe was left with one dark huddle on the ground, a Crow Indian buck who now had a black, round eye in the middle of his forehead. It was the first man of any sort Rosebud Joe had killed.

Joe dug a shallow grave. Before throwing back the dirt on top of the body, he got the ranch Bible, and gravely, with many pauses and brow wrinklins in the lantern light, he read

out a chapter selected at random. It happened to concern the casting overboard of an unpopular fisherman named Jonah, and vaguely seemed appropriate to Joe.

That finished, he planed a pine board which he nailed to a stake at the head of the grave. Lettered in black was the terse legend:

HOSS THIEF PROBLY CROW

NEXT morning he found the pole corral had been opened by the marauders, and though they had not taken any horses, all the stock had wandered out. The stallions were still hopped, so it did not take very long to recapture them. But Joe had to delay his start for the Fort another two days.

Three trips to Dickerson apparently had finished his luck. He was half way on the fourth and last trip when real

trouble caught him. The horse range lay behind. This was the Broken Butte country, forty miles or so south of the Yellowstone River and Forsythe, and about fifteen miles from the Fort. The bed of Sundown Creek was dry when the little herd passed. Ahead was a downslant of country where jagged rocks blistered under the September sun.

Here Rosebud Joe had been forced to drive the animals down a boulder-strewn hardpan wash which once had been a stage road. It had not been used for years, save by stray riders. It formed a defile that narrowed, with rocks on both sides. It was only three miles long, though, and below the country looked green with the knee-high buffalo grass.

Peering ahead Joe caught sight of a moving figure. An Indian on horseback! The Indian vanished. But Joe frowned. He halted the thirsty herd and rode a little way forward. Then he saw the trouble prepared—though probably not meant for him.

Where the narrow slant of defile met the floor of the valley, three Indians had rigged up a corral of brush and rawhide. It was a horse trap. Any wild horses or tame stock coming down the defile would enter the corral. The Indians, lying there hidden in a pit, would yank rawhide ropes, closing the way back. Then they would rope and take their prizes at leisure, since even a wild horse will not often question even as flimsy a barrier as a brush hedge.

With considerable trouble, Joe headed the herd back uphill the way he had come. But he did not go very far. Back up there, sounded far away whoops; and he saw tiny black dots moving. Indians!

In a few moments Joe understood,

and his heart sank. The Indian raiders, balked at the V Up and V Down, had started one of their two or three-day relay hunts of wild horses. They might even have Redbird there. They would drive the band now into the defile, and down into the trap prepared. The wild stallion and his mares, if it could really be Redbird, would be so winded, tired out and thirsty, that they all would be near collapse. The Indians would be tired out, too, though not so greatly, since they knew how wild horses travel in circles, and would have spelled each other in relays. This, though, was the coup. And Rosebud Joe was caught, with the valuable Morgans, between the horse drivers and the three Indians waiting down there at the trap.

Joe dismounted, snatching out his carbine—then slowly thrusting it back and examining his single-action Colt. A sort of desperate plan to save the horses had sprung into his mind. But only the revolver would be of any use. And if he failed—well, not only would the ranch and Big Jim lose these most valuable of the Morgans, but Rosebud Joe would lose his life.

He thought of that all right, but he was running as he thought. Running for a fissure in the rocks, which might let him climb and belly around, so as to take the three Indians below somewhat by surprise. They had to be eliminated or captured, and before the other part of the raiding band got down there with the horses.

Joe hurried. The way was rough, and for a few moments he thought it barred by a vertical cliff face. Then he saw a way around, a slide of rubble, and then the floor of the valley. He made it, hurrying, muttering a sort of half prayer with his lips, that finding the Morgans there in the defile would slow

up the oncoming horse-drivers a few minutes.

He was snaking up on his belly now, the six-shooter out in front as he rested weight on a corded wrist. He had the keen bowie he used for skinning, clasped in his teeth. After the alarm there would be little chance to reload the revolver.

Now he heard voices. There it was, the shallow hole where the three Indians had hidden themselves. A black topknot raised. Then came a grunt of surprise. Black, beady eyes in a red-brown face swivelled toward Joe. A rifle came up, as the jabbered alarm brought the buck's two companions into sight.

Joe shot and scrambled to his feet. His side stung waspishly, as the black powder bloomed from the observation hole. Joe dodged and ran forward. He shot down now as two men diverged from the smoke, rising to meet him.

One yelled and shot. Joe staggered around, with a stinging there high at the left of his neck, where he realized the warm red flood was coming from a wound—probably a shattered collarbone, since his left arm was hard to use.

He shot twice, and saw the two braves fall away. One kicked and yowled, then choked as red foam slobbered on his mouth. The other was still. And between them as Joe came right on, was a buck kneeling. His head had fallen down in front, though, and there was a wide gray-red blob of brains and blood exposed to the air.

Joe had no idea of burial service this time. He dashed ahead, and to the back of the corral trap. There he slashed the sustaining rawhides with his bowie, till a section twenty feet wide fell down. Then he crouched, and thumbed in fresh shells fast, into the Colt.

Then the horses came. Three of them, pressed madly by those behind, stumbled and fell, got up snorting, fell again. It was confusion, but into it, barely escaping being knocked down and trampled a dozen times, darted Joe.

He had glimpsed the trouble; and despite his numb left arm and the aching tear in his side, he had to venture. Those hopped stallions! He slashed at the rawhide hobbles, freed them. With the other horses, at least thirty of them mares and bearing the burrs and signs of range freedom on their coats, the stallions snorted and made for the gap in the brush corral.

Now angry yells from fatigue hoarsened redskins told that Joe himself was seen. A rifle cracked, and a portion of his Stetson brim was torn away. He fired twice—and then, as he thought the end had come, he saw a saddled and bridle-trailing pony at his side. His own horse, brought with the tide of equines!

Abandoning the fight, he raced for the pony, flung himself to his back, leaned forward to shield himself and gather the reins, and then dug spurred heels into the animal's flanks. It jumped ahead, and followed the Morgans and the wild herd through the break in the corral.

The Indians, tired to the marrow by their relay chase, disappointed, and probably shocked by sight of their three dead comrades, did not even pursue. Four hours later, seeing the back country free of dust clouds, Rosebud Joe detached his lariat and built himself a loop. Up there ahead was a horse he had been watching for hours, a staggering, almost collapsed wild stallion taller than the Morgans. A horse that breathed loudly through blood-red nostrils, and whose mane and tail were

limp pennons now with the lather of exhaustion.

Joe came close, and tossed his loop over Redbird, prize wild horse of the Montana range. And the wild stallion rolled his eyes, but did not fight at all.

* * *

THE first sifting of powder snow had come down in the night from the Big Horns. The November range was iron hard with frost. The spring wagon which had brought a man with crutches from the railway at Forsythe, rattled and bounced as it came to the fence and gate of the V Up and V Down.

The halfbreed hostler who drove, got down and opened the gate. Big Jim drove through, then waited, though his frowning face was twitching with gloom, worry and impatience. Ahead there, through the bare cottonwoods, he could see the huddle of buildings of his ranch. Not a horse in sight. Not a living creature. No smoke from the ranch-house or cook shack.

"Well, anyway, they ain't burned," he said half aloud. He had learned of the death of his foreman, and expected nothing at all. It was a bitter homecoming for the ranchman. He had written to Matt Halleck, the banker, asking the latter to transfer the money in his savings account to a checking account, but the banker had written back tersely, saying the bankbook in the hands of Rosebud Joe, was necessary. Big Jim had written Rosebud Joe several times, but there had been no answer. Matt Halleck, evidently assuming that the ranchman knew what his button had been doing, had said nothing more. So Big Jim had come back home thinking himself probably close to cleaned out, happy even to find the buildings waiting him. Of course he could never make

much of a horse ranch of this again. Lucky if he could sell out to somebody with capital to start a herd. . . .

"If there ain't a soul here, yuh'll have to take me back to town. So, when I git down, wait," Big Jim told the halfbreed. "I can't ride a hoss yet, an' I don't care about bein' here on crutches alone."

He managed to get down, and get the crutches under his arms. Then he started for the porch. A sudden shout of gladness and welcome made him turn toward the bunkhouse. A long-legged, broad-shouldered man in overalls that were tattered and patched, came running. With difficulty Big Jim recognized the half-starved, runty youth he had left here with Sam Hardy only five months earlier.

"Boss! Big Jim!" cried Rosebud Joe. His benefactor and hero had come home. "I'm so glad—my Lord—I—I—" and then he flushed and became a little embarrassed. "I—ain't got much, but come on in. I'll wrastle some grub. It's on'y beans, but—"

"Hm. Livin' on beans, eh?" said Big Jim. "An' yuh stuck here all alone? Not anybody a-tall? Not them three men I sent?"

"Nobody's been here—not sence Sam—died," said Joe, and helped the big man with the crutches, as he came up the three stairs to the porch.

"It needs airin', I guess," said Joe. "I been livin' in the bunkhouse. But c'mon in, Boss. Lordy, I'm glad to see yuh!"

"I'm kinda glad to be back—kinda," said Big Jim. "On'y, I ain't got a thing left but the land an' buildings now, kid. Oh, an' the money yuh got for sellin' them hosses. That was good, on'y—I owe plenty of that back to the docs an' hospital at Miles City."

That was when Joe, a little flustered but rather proud just the same, brought out the little bankbook.

"Yuh got this, Boss," he said. "I didn't take out none, after the hundred Matt Halleck give me—'cept I did take fifteen, so's I c'd get a bag of oats an' a bar'l of apples. I had to have them, uh, f'r a kinda personal reason."

Big Jim stared down at the carried-forward total in the bankbook. His eyes widened. They started to bulge. The figures there said more than thirty-one thousand dollars. And he had figured all his stock, even if sold by himself, to have been worth in the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand!

"Yuh—yuh got *this*?" he managed to whisper.

"Yeah, it's in the bank in yore name. I had some luck, an' got some wild hosses too, asides the Morgans. The army needed 'em. I got pretty good prices."

"Hm. Not bad," said Big Jim in a voice that suddenly was hoarse. He reached shaking fingers inside his coat, and brought out makin's. He built a quirly with difficulty, and lighted it.

"An' yuh ain't paid yoreself wages, eh?" he said half to himself. "Livin' on apples an' a hundred dollars in beans . . . hell!"

"I—I tell yuh, Big Jim," said Joe almost breathlessly. "I was hopin' somp'n. I s'pose he—he b'longs to yuh, really, but I was hopin' yuh'd let me keep him, 'stead of wages. I—I was

lucky, an' caught the Redbird, an' now I got him gentled—"

"Uh—yuh—yuh *caught* the Redbird?" Big Jim almost choked.

But Rosebud Joe had run to the door. Out there on the porch he put two fingers to his mouth and screeched a peculiar whistle. From out back of the bunkhouse a tall, proud chestnut—a horse curried and brushed till he shone burnished copper in the sunshine—came singlefooting. He whinnied at sight of Joe, and came straight to the railing. He was so tall he could reach over and nose right into Joe's overalls pocket. He got the apple that always waited there for him, and tossed his head three times in acknowledgment as he ate it with relish.

Big Jim had clumped to the doorway on his crutches. He was swearing admiration and wonderment.

"Yeah, he's yours all right, son," he almost whispered. "What a hoss! An'—what a kid!" He turned back to the table, eyes shining.

"Hrmph. Say, Joe," he said gruffly, when the button returned smiling happily, "go out an' tell that halfbreed to wait f'r us. You'n me are goin' into town. Iffen he'll have me, I got myself a new pardner on the V Up and V Down—an' Rosebud Joe has got himself a last name, Haskins!"

"I—don't understand," puzzled the boy.

"Well, nemmind right now. I'm goin' to get a lot of pleasure teachin' yuh that in the years to come, Joe!"

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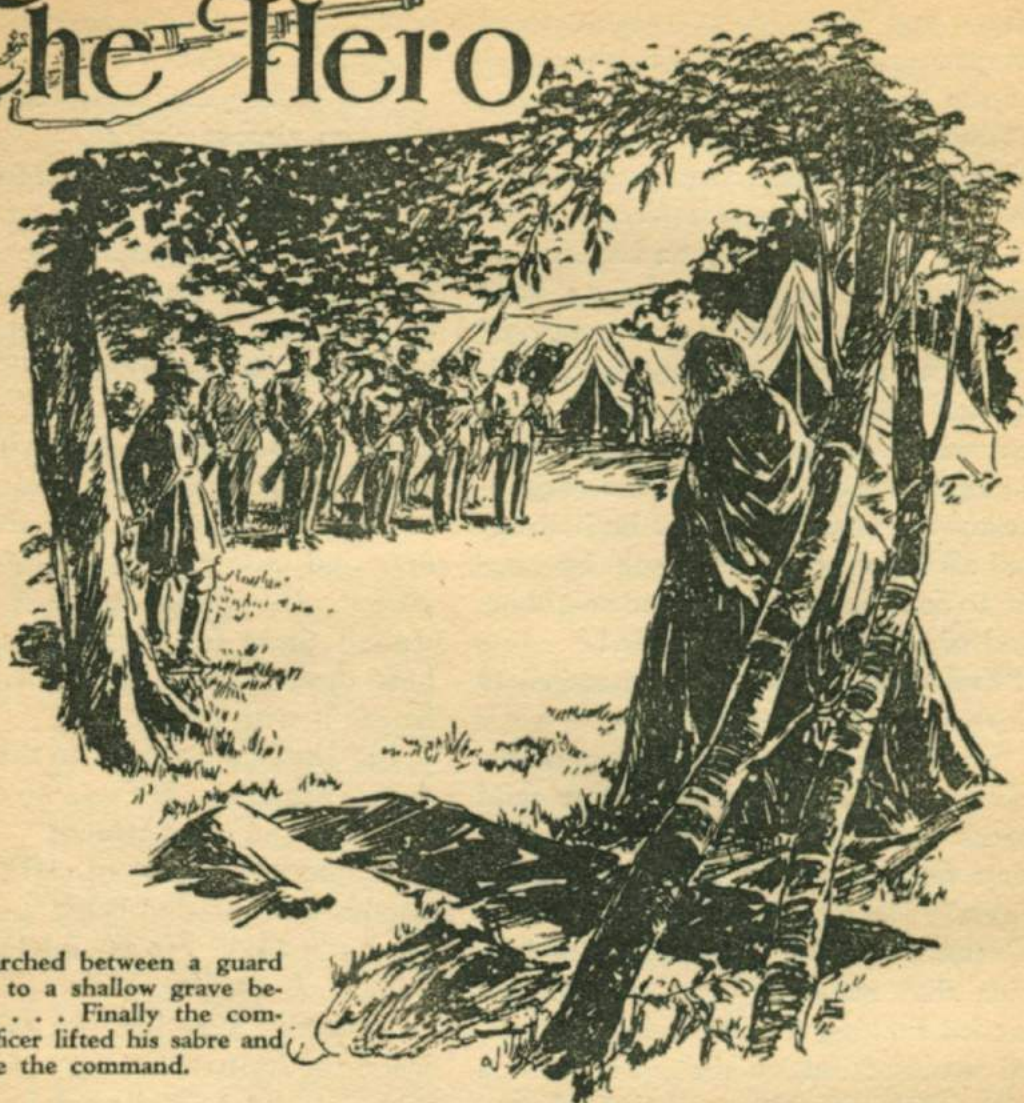
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The Hero



He was marched between a guard of riflemen to a shallow grave beside a hill. . . . Finally the commanding officer lifted his sabre and gave the command.

by HAL G. VERMES

THAT was the funny thing about grandpop's story. It had a head and a tail, all right; a beginning and an end, like they say. But still an important detail was missing, same as if in a jig-saw picture puzzle of Washington crossing the Delaware the piece with the general on it was lost.

This being Memorial Day was what reminded me of it; it being a day of remembrance of our soldiers and sailors. All the churches and different societies are putting new clean flags

by the headstones up at Pine Hill. But we folks chipped in and got a special silk flag for grandpop's grave; even the kids saved up their pennies for it. Now he'll have a pretty flag that will last till snow comes, anyway; that's what grandpop always used to say: "I'll last till the snow comes."

He did, too; he hung on 'way after Thanksgiving. That sure was going some, seeing that he was past eighty-seven. He got kind of wobbly there toward the last but he wouldn't let on. Of course he had a cane, been carrying

one for years; but he always said the only reason he kept it was because all the swells carried them when he was a boy and he'd got the habit and couldn't quit.

His eyesight wasn't so good, either, when he got along past seventy-five. Naturally dad and me and the rest of the family expected it in a man of his years; but he wouldn't admit it for a minute, not grandpop. We had to be careful as the dickens because if we showed we thought he wasn't as spry as he used to be, he'd lay about him with that heavy cane of his and anybody or anything that got in the way was sure to get hurt.

Take for instance Roy, that's my younger boy, he used to play a trick on his great-grandpop that always got a smile out of dad or me because it showed up the way grandpop was still trying to fool us. Roy would saunter along the porch where grandpop was usually sitting; first he'd say hello to the old man and then he'd lean against a post with his hands in his pockets and stare down the road. Well sir, he wouldn't never do that for long before grandpop would speak up at him and say, "What are you looking at, boy?" And Roy would keep staring and yell so grandpop could hear: "Oh, I'm watching a frisky mare down the road a piece." Grandpop would look himself and then after a bit Roy would spring it on him easy like so's he wouldn't get suspicious. "Grandfer," Roy, would say, "can you see the horse all right?" And grandpop would straighten up and answer, "Why certainly, boy; it's a bay."

Of course there wasn't no horse there at all. I made the young one quit doing it after a while because a boy has got to learn to respect his elders;

not that Roy meant any harm. And then there was grandpop's hearing; you had to shout at him the last ten years of his life, but you had to pretend that you wasn't. And whether he heard you or not, he always give some kind of an answer.

That brings me to what I was getting at: his memory. Naturally it wasn't quite so good after he was getting on toward eighty. Not that I mean to say he was like a school boy who can't never remember his three R's. Grandpop had a lot of things packed in his head right up until the day he died. But speaking from my own observation, memory is a peculiar thing; when we get on in years we seem to remember best the things that are most important and forget the little ones that don't count. And here, the way I see it, is the funny part: the important things we remember aren't the ones we thought was important when we were young. We get a new valuation sort of, on life and living. What we thought was so particular important when we were young don't seem to amount to a darn when we get older and we clean forget them; and it's just the other way about with the other things; people and places and ideas that we thought we had forgotten all about, stir up in our memories when we get as old as grandpop was, and turn out to be the most important things after all.

Leastways that's the way it appears to me, though I don't claim to be a philosopher. And it's the way my son Roy felt about grandpop's favorite story. He figured he was leaving the most important part of it out, and I did too until what dad said that day got me to thinking.

Of course one thing grandpop al-

ways remembered because he was in it, was the American Civil War. The War, he called it, like that, with capital letters. It was the only war he ever thought about. Whenever I would be telling my boys of my experiences over in France in 1918, grandpop would always pretend that he wasn't listening. And if I ever put it up to him direct he'd shrug his shoulders and stroke his beard and say just as though it wasn't nothing at all: "Yes, I heard something about you boys being in a little fracas over there in Europe. What did it amount to—much?"

I kind of suspect, thinking of it now that he's gone, that he was just having his little joke on me, but he never let on. I never did pretend to know, anyway, just what went on in his head, bald like a pumpkin it was, though he made up for it with that white beard of his which was longer than Moses.'

But before I get on to grandpop's favorite story about The War perhaps I ought to say something about our family. We're roamers, you know; always have been, though now we're sort of settled down because there's no need for moving about, what with railroads everywhere and fast ships and airplanes. But grandpop was always on the move; he floated barges down the Ohio and the Mississippi after The War; and his dad before him went out to California in forty-nine. My dad's been everywhere, too, and he dragged the whole lot of us every place.

I talked to a professor out at Notre Dame once and I didn't have to tell him that I was a roamer as he figured it right off from my talk. "Judging from your speech," says he, "I'd say you were born in South Carolina of New England parentage, got your education

in California, and then went to live in New York."

Well, that professor wasn't so far wrong at that. Seems like our family never come from any place and never stayed any place long. By the way, did I tell you that our family name is Smith? That's a regular name and we're just regular folk. We're the Jed Smiths; likely as not you've heard of us. The oldest boy in our families has always been named Jed; grandpop's name was Jed, so's my dad's, and it's the same with me; we're the Jed Smiths. No matter where you live, it wouldn't be surprising if you'd run across one of us. Like I explained, we're from all over.

Grandpop, dad tells me, was a spry one in his day and while he always could see the funny side of life, there was one thing that riled him. You know how when you come to a new town folks usually greets you friendly like by saying: "Where you from, stranger?" Well, that used to get under grandpop's skin. He'd stare down at the townsman from his barge or a Conestoga wagon—whichever it was—and say with a flicker of a smile in his eye: "I'm from the United States. What the heck place is this?"

But dad, who's a more mild-mannered man, taught me to put it different. We were sailing off the east coast of Florida when I was a kid and dad and me took the jolly-boat one day to do a little fishing. But we was caught in some bad weather and got whipped about till I thought we'd sure seen our last day. The jolly-boat went over and we hung to it till the sun come out again. Then dad climbed up and straddled the keel and dragged me after him. It wasn't till nearly sun-

down when we come in sight of a town and some folks put out in a boat. When they got to us, one fellow says to dad, "Howdy, stranger, where you - all from?" Dad was about ready to pass out from helping me to hold on all day but he come right back at the townsman. "What place is this?" dad asks in a kind of snappy way. "Why," says the fellow, "this is Key West." "Well then," says dad, "that's where we're from."

So you see we're not Easterners or Westerners, Southerners nor Northerners; we're Americans. It took me years to get that all straight, but with grandpop it just came natural like; his memory took care of that. Like I said, it remembered the important things and plumb forgot all the rest.

IT WAS grandpop's favorite story and he told it every chance he could get. I heard it so many times that I can remember how he used to polish it up here and there. Grandpop never could seem to get the location right. Sometimes he said it was up toward Orchard Knob north of Chattanooga and another time he'd say it happened outside of Cold Harbor; and then again he'd connect it up with Vicksburg or Jackson. But of course dad and me never said anything because it was grandpop's story and he could tell it any way he liked.

I'll never forget to my dying day the last time I heard him tell it. That's because that was the day Roy popped up with the question and dad made the remark that set me to thinking.

"Well," grandpop would start off, "he was too young to have a beard; couldn't have been more than sixteen or seventeen at the most. And he

didn't wear no uniform because, you see, he was a scout. The only time I saw him in uniform was in Sixty-one, at the beginning of The War; then lots of the Federal troops was wearing gray and of course the Confederate soldiers was, too. But after the first battle of Bull Run they see their mistake and the Union men switched to blue.

"But this fellow Mordaunt, he never wore a uniform after that—just civilian pants and a hickory shirt or whatever he could get a hold on. Like I said, he was a scout and he kept carrying messages from one side of the lines to the other till—till the time I'm going to tell you about."

Right there in his story grandpop would get up from his chair on the porch and act out some of the first battles for us: Big Bethel, Bull Run, and Ball's Bluff. He'd wave and whip his cane around so fast that we kids had to look sharp to keep from getting hit. Believe me, it sure was exciting.

"And during them battles," grandpop would continue after he got his breath. "Mordaunt was running back and forth from one side of the Potomac to the other carrying messages in code. He was at Gettysburg, too, and at Hagerstown. He carried his life in his hands every minute of the day and night, Mordaunt did. But you'd never know it to look at him. There was a look in his eye that you couldn't stare down and he always carried his shoulders high.

"He was running messages before the battle of Fredericksburg when he got word that someone was in trouble at home. It took him a week to make it what with him losing his horse when it broke a leg in a post hole. He traveled only at night and often lost his

way in the dark. Finally he made it, though he hadn't had nothing to eat and was half dead.

"But it was too late, for when he got home the soldiers had already been there. They'd tore up the house from roof-tree to cellar and found what they was looking for, and they took his mother away. She, you see, was a spy. Mordaunt had done all he could to dissuade her but she had said that they only had each other, seeing as how his father had got killed at Antietam, and she couldn't let her boy risk his life without her doing her share, too.

"Sitting there in what was left of their home and his mother gone, Mordaunt knew what had happened and he broke down and cried as if his heart would break—after all, he was only a boy.

"It had been over a year and a half since Fort Sumter was fired on and everybody had learned long before that war was a mighty serious business. Mordaunt knew that they wouldn't hold out no mercy for his mother just because she was a woman; particularly because she was a proud young girl then and wouldn't never give in and tell where her son was. Mordaunt was sure of that.

"His worst fears was confirmed when a couple of soldiers come back to the ruined house to look for food and he hid and overheard them talking about his mother who, they said, was going to be shot. The soldiers spoke of how she wouldn't reveal no secrets and how she refused to tell where her son was in spite of all their threats.

"But that was small comfort to the boy who was hiding there, hungry, tired, and sick at the thought that his own mother who had borne him,

nursed him, and loved him, was going to die."

You could hear the wind hushing through the wheat when grandpop got to that part of his story. Though he'd told it heaps of times before, we hardly dared breathe and we kept our eyes tight on grandpop while he refilled his pipe and lit it up. Funny, but seems he always did, right at that part; I suppose it was because he'd related the story to us so often that he'd got into the habit of going on with it just so.

"Well," says grandpop, after he'd gotten a good draw on his pipe, "when it got dark again Mordaunt made himself coffee out of some parched potatoes which was all he could find and then he went out back of the house and rolled in some icy mud until he was covered with it, his hickory shirt and everything, so that he was so dirty and black that he couldn't be seen in the dark. And he took a black piece of cloth and tied it over his face, cutting slits to see through, because he knew there's nothing shows up at night like a white beardless face.

"Then he slowly wiggled his way into the camp where his mother was. He knew about where the prison tent would be from what he overheard the soldiers say. But it took him nearly all night to worm his way there because he was mighty careful knowing that he mustn't fail.

"It was just a few hours before dawn when he finally slipped into the tent where his mother was and pressed his hand over her mouth so's she wouldn't scream, while he whispered his name in her ear. There was a candle flickering in the tent so's the guard outside could see any movement

from the shadows. Mordaunt had brought pencil and paper along and he slid under the cot and slipped up notes to his mother telling her just what to do. He took off his clothes and passed them up to her and she put them on under the blankets while he slid into her dress and squeezed into her shoes.

"When they'd changed their clothes complete, he passed her a scissors he'd brought along and after braiding her hair, she cut it off. Pulling his cap down over her shorn head, his mother smiled for the first time; naturally she thought they was both going to escape. But Mordaunt explained to her in scribbles that they couldn't do that because dawn was almost on them and as soon as the guard found that the tent was empty, the alarm would be raised and they'd both be caught before they had time to get away.

"'You're a soldier, Mother,' he wrote in his last note to her, 'and you must do what's best for all. I must stay here disguised as you and fool them to the very end, or when they find out you've escaped they'll never rest till you are caught and I'll only have saved you to die again. For my sake, Mother, you must go for I cannot die bravely unless I know that you will be free.'

"The poor mother wanted to speak to her boy—to say one last word of comfort—but she could not because it would have meant the death of both of them. So when she slipped down to the floor from the bed, she pressed him to her breast and kissed him and wet his cheeks with her tears—and then she crawled away in the night to freedom.

"When she was gone, Mordaunt

lay upon the bed in her clothes, put her bonnet on his head and pinned her Paisley shawl tightly over it all. At sun-up the guard lifted the tent flap and he came out, his head low on his breast. He was marched between a guard of riflemen to a shallow grave beside a hill. The commanding officer was kind, thinking it was a woman and trembling pale because he was forced to shoot her as a spy. He asked if there was anything she wished to say but Mordaunt still hung his head and was silent. Misunderstanding the officer wondered how a daring spy at the last moment could be so afraid. Finally he lifted his sabre and gave the command and the soldiers fired. And so it was that Mordaunt died and was buried where he fell."

THAT was grandpop's favorite story of the Civil War. And no matter how frequent we heard it, we always was quiet for a minute after he was done because seems like there was nothing to say. But that last time grandpop told it, my son Roy was sitting beside me and he'd never heard it before. He'd just been studying up on American history at school and when grandpop finished Roy asked him a question right off.

"Grandfer," he said, "that's a wonderful story. But what I want to know is whether this Mordaunt was a damned Yank or a Johnnie Reb."

"Why, boy," grandpop replied, scratching his bald head. "I'll be dad busted if I ain't clean forget!"

And then it was that my dad pulled his pipe from his mouth and spoke up. "It doesn't make any difference," he said slow and thoughtful like. All that matters is that he was a hero."

An American Mandarin

by ALLEN P. WESCOTT

*"An illustrious man from beyond the seas,
he came 6000 li to accomplish great deeds
and acquire immortal fame by shedding
his noble blood. Because of him Sungkiang
shall be a happy land for a thousand
autumns."*

CHINA'S Tai-ping revolt, or "war of the Long-haired Rebels" broke out in 1850. Its leader, Hung-ts'üan, self styled Tien-teh (Celestial Virtue) and Tien-wang (Heavenly King) announced himself a heaven-sent reformer. He sought to dethrone the Manchu dynasty and to found, in his own person, that of Tai-ping or Universal Peace. During fifteen years of sanguinary insurrection, the Tai-pings all but wrecked the weak Manchu dynasty. They captured various important cities including Nanking. By 1860 the insurrection reached formidable proportions. The rebels sought to obtain the rich coastal provinces about Shanghai, openly threatening to occupy the treaty ports. The rebellion was finally crushed by troops of various nationalities under General Ward and Colonel Gordon. The story of "Chinese" Gordon is well known since he later achieved fame in the Sudan. The story of Ward is less widely known.

Frederick Townsend Ward was born November 29, 1831, at Salem, Mass. His natural capacity for leadership became apparent early. As a boy he showed daring in handling small boats. He spent two years at Norwich University, acquiring some knowledge of military science and tactics. His father was a shipmaster, and upon leaving Norwich, young Ward went to sea as did most men from new England coast towns in

the 1840's. For a dozen years he roamed far and wide. On the Isthmus of Tehuantepec he first put into practice his military training. Later he campaigned in Nicaragua under William Walker, most renowned of all American Soldiers of Fortune. In the Crimean War, Ward served as lieutenant in the French army. In 1859 he appeared in Shanghai, taking a job on a Yangtze River steamer.

In 1860 the crisis of the Tai-ping rebellion was reached. Anglo-French resistance protected Shanghai itself, but the outlying districts were at the mercy of the Tai-pings. Ward became acquainted with an influential merchant named Takee, and through him, proposed that for \$200,000 he would recapture and garrison the city of Sungkiang, held by 10,000 rebels. Obtaining a commission from the Imperial Government and some financial support from the merchants, Ward set about to organize an army. He gathered a band of about 100 adventurous spirits of various nationalities—sailors, beach combers, remnants of various expeditions, anyone who knew anything at all of arms. These he made officers and they, in turn, drilled his native recruits. Ward made good his offer to take Sungkiang, and receiving his monetary reward was made a mandarin of the fourth class.

Encouraged by success at Sungkiang, Ward attacked Tsingpu, but as that city was strongly defended, Ward was unable to effect immediate capture and he himself was wounded. He rested his handful of troops at Sungkiang while

he set about raising a larger army. Ward received official support but encountered opposition from the foreign consuls, particularly the British, who arrested him. Escaping from a warship where he was confined he went ahead with his organizing. In due time he had a well-trained and disciplined army of three regiments, about 4,000 men. With this force he began a successful campaign. A series of victories followed including Tsingpu, where Ward, then brevet brigadier-general, was cited for gallantry in action. With the capture of Ningpo, the French and British military authorities ceased regarding Ward as an outlaw adventurer, recognized his great military genius, and welcomed his aid. With his co-operation Shanghai was saved from capture and a 30-mile radius around the city cleared of rebels. His legion inspired such fear in the Tai-pings that the title of "Ever Victorious Army" was bestowed upon it. Ward was made admiral-general and mandarin of the first class. Not only was he a natural leader—tradition has it that he was loved by his soldiers while Gordon was merely respected—but absolutely fearless. In battle Ward invariably went unarmed though he always carried a riding-whip or cane. This custom followed by Gordon has since become universal in the British service.

In an assault upon Tziki, Ward was mortally wounded. He died the following day, September 21, 1862, at Ningpo. At his own request he was buried at Sungkiang near the temple of Confucius, and close to the drill-field where he had trained the "Ever Victorious Army." A magnificent state funeral was accorded him and later a memorial temple was erected in his honor. Here grateful Chinese offered

sacrifices to his spirit. Ward left a young widow, Chang Mei, daughter of Takee.

Upon Ward's death, command of the legion fell to Captain Burgevine who was soon dismissed in favor of Captain Holland. Holland, following defeat at Tai-Tsan, went the way of Burgevine. Li Hung Chang, governor-general of Kiangsu, applied to the British for a commander and Charles George Gordon was loaned. Gordon, at the head of Ward's old army, was successful almost at once. In July, 1864, Nanking was taken. The rebellion was completely stamped out the following year. While Gordon probably deserved all the honors he received, it should be remembered that he succeeded to an already efficient fighting machine, with the task of suppressing the rebellion well advanced.

Ward's daring enterprise justified itself in the teeth of foreign opposition and Chinese jealousy. Other Chinese armies resented the superior attitude of Ward's native soldiers. Officials worried over costs of maintenance. Widespread gossip credited Ward with untoward ambitions though his actions revealed none.

Although he had become a Chinese and adopted Chinese customs, Ward, shortly before his death, offered his services to the United States. He gave 10,000 taels to the Union cause, and had the *Trent* affair resulted in war with Great Britain, Ward had planned to seize the British warships and merchant vessels in Chinese waters. Just as the execution at Trujillo of his old chief William Walker, deprived the Confederacy of a great general, so was Ward's untimely death at Ningpo a great loss to the Union army.

The Round Table



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THE EDITORS of "GOLDEN FLEECE" will appreciate and welcome letters of criticism and suggestions from readers. Although this magazine is primarily intended to feature historical adventure stories, we will by no means be bound to any unbreakable editorial policy in this respect.

If the majority of readers want some adventure stories of more modern times and possibly some laid in the future, they shall have them or any other type of story that they demand.

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We have spared no expense in acquiring stories of a better type than are usually run in pulp magazines. We hope you like them as much as we do.

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THE EDITORS

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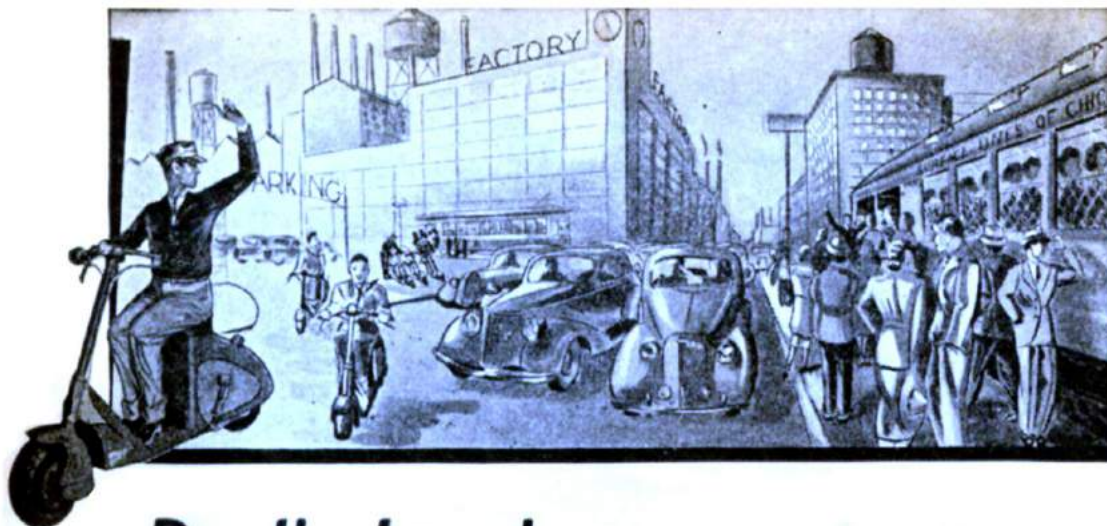
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